

BIBLICAL THEISM ENHANCED OR TRANSFORMED? AN EVALUATION OF PAUL  
TILlich'S CONCEPT OF GOD.

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ABSTRACT

BIBLICAL THEISM ENHANCED OR TRANSFORMED? AN EVALUATION OF PAUL TILLICH'S CONCEPT OF GOD.

This dissertation seeks to establish whether Paul Tillich's God-concept is theistic or not. Has Tillich transformed theism into something else? To answer this question requires a detailed examination of Tillich's concept of "being-itself" as a translation of the term "God". It can be established that the concept has a place within Christian tradition, and may be seriously considered as an alternative description to the supernaturalistic idea of God. In this latter conception, which still has broad acceptance today, God is seen as a being, an object located somewhere in space. The primitive and anthropomorphic nature of such a description of God is criticised in this dissertation; such a conception must give way to a more sophisticated one.

The concept of "being-itself", though, must be tested against the nominalist objection that there are only existing beings and that there is no category of "existence" or "being". This dissertation shows how an idealist model for being-itself can be defended against the objections of nominalism. However, Tillich is not an idealist (as is amply shown) and because of this the concept of being-itself loses much of its forcefulness. For if, as Tillich insists, creator and creation are distinct and separate from each other, then what can the terms "being-itself" and "ground of being" mean? The term "ground" could only mean "source", not "underlying substance". It is argued, though, that Tillich wants the term (and, by extension, "being-itself") to imply both meanings at once, so as to give force

to an immanentist theology without surrendering the notion of God's transcendence. In other words, Tillich's theology is accused of a certain ambiguity and imprecision.

Yet even if the term "being-itself" seems unsatisfactory, Tillich's idea that God is forcefully present within the world of men is defensible without an insistence on the term. It is argued that the idea of Spirit can convey such nearness and, further, it is contended that this term is the only satisfactory one to describe God. In the dissertation it is pointed out that "Spirit" can imply a "surrounding" omnipresence as easily as it can imply an "inhabiting" omnipresence. If God is perceived as "Surrounding Spirit", then an immanentist theism, which has a strong emphasis on religious experience as the factor which establishes the existence of God, can be formulated. Idealism (the model in which Spirit "inhabits" matter) is then avoided; it is argued that this is necessary if God's transcendence is to be maintained.

The second half of the dissertation examines the extent of Tillich's appeal outside the boundaries of traditional theism. Does Tillich's concept of God broaden, and thus enhance, the appeal of theism? The answer, in the main, is affirmative. To be sure, Tillich's description of the awareness of the ultimate cannot convince the atheist of the existence of God. Yet such a description certainly points the way to an understanding of what such a conviction entails.

Outside of his appeal to the atheist, it is argued that Tillich's theology has been important in establishing Christian dialogue with other faiths and in contributing to the debate on religious

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secularity. Even if Tillich has expressed serious reservations about the "Radical Theology" he is said to have inspired, one could also claim a success for Tillich in this field in that he has helped to spawn a religious school of thought which is at least vigorous and adventurous. Radical theologians clearly state that Tillich provided them with a mandate to explore the God-concept in an unrestricted way, and even if the arguments of this school go beyond what Tillich felt was acceptable, one must at least concede that these theologians have revitalised religious thought. This revitalisation owes much to Tillich, whose stress on God's immanence and our experience of him in this secular realm, has done much to re-emphasise the immediacy of the divine presence in the life of man.

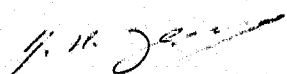
The conclusion arrived at in this dissertation is that, despite certain terminological imprecisions, Tillich's theology enhances theism without transforming it. Paul Tillich, it is held, must be seen as a theologian of the greatest consequence.



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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.



Jeffrey Neil Zerbst

8 November 1985

PREFACE

This study was undertaken with the purpose of determining the current philosophical position with respect to theism's most central concept, the idea of God. I determined to investigate this concept through the theology of Paul Tillich, whom I consider to be of the utmost importance for present and future debates concerning what God is and what He is to be in the minds of men.

My dissertation, I hope, contributes something of value to a period of theological uncertainty, in which the traditional concept of God is under careful and serious review. I feel confident that I have shown that the modern church will have to take earnest cognizance of Paul Tillich's concept of God in its ongoing deliberations on the nature of the divine.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Professor Ben Engelbrecht, my supervisor, for introducing me to the work of Paul Tillich and for encouraging me to examine this great theologian's work in detail.

I should also like to thank my two typists: Karen Bouwer for typing the draft manuscripts and Annesu de Vos, whose battles with the word processor led to frequent incursions into the sad realm of the disreputably profane.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the Human Sciences Research Council for their financial assistance.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following are the abbreviations used in the text to refer to works by Paul Tillich:

- CEWR - Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions
- CTB - The Courage to Be
- DCOF - Discussion: Christianity and Other Faiths
- DF - The Dynamics of Faith
- HCT - A History of Christian Thought
- LPJ - Love, Power and Justice
- MSA - My Search for Absolutes
- NRL - The Nature of Religious Language
- PCSVA - Protestantism and the Contemporary Style in the  
Visual Arts
- PE - The Protestant Era
- SF - The Shaking of the Foundations
- SHRST - The Significance of the History of Religions for  
the Systematic Theologian
- ST - Systematic Theology (Volumes I - III)
- TC - Theology of Culture

The following are the abbreviations used in the text to refer to works of other writers:

Thomas Altizer

- AFT - America and the Future of Technology
- GCA - The Gospel of Christian Atheism

Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

- LPP - Letters and Papers from Prison

Harvey Cox:

- SC - The Secular City

Sigmund Freud:

- FI - The Future of an Illusion
- TT - Totem and Taboo

John Hick:

- AEG - Arguments for the Existence of God
- GUF - God and the Universe of Faiths
- MGI - The Myth of God Incarnate
- PR - Philosophy of Religion

Søren Kierkegaard:

- CUP - Concluding and Unscientific Postscript
- PF - Philosophical Fragments

John MacQuarrie:

- PCT - Principles of Christian Theology
- TCRT - Twentieth-Century Religious Thought

Richard Rubenstein:

- AA - After Auschwitz
- ME - Morality and Eros
- PS - Power Struggle

The bibliographical details of the works here referred to may be found in the bibliography at the back.

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CHAPTER ONEINTRODUCTION: PAUL TILlich AND THE "HONEST TO GOD" DEBATE

"The basic theological question," says Paul Tillich, "is the question of God." [Tillich, ST I, p 181, 1955] Religion, in the Judeo-Christian context, requires a clear and understandable picture of God. The worshipping believer, though, is more encouraged to establish a "relationship" with God than define him. Nevertheless, the same believer must have some idea of the nature of that to which he dedicates himself. Theology must attempt to tell us something of God's nature, for the whole Judeo-Christian tradition revolves around its concept of God.

In the western world a traditional picture of God has been built up. The picture, in simplified form, is as follows: God is a person, an entity, inhabiting a spatial realm beyond the earth. From this realm he watches earthly events, and influences them as he sees fit. It is at once noticeable that such a conception has a strong anthropomorphic element. God is seen as a person, albeit a perfect one, operating from a domestic base. This person is an entity, i.e. he is physically circumscribed in his being. This person inhabits a region somewhere in the cosmos, to which region purified souls ascend.

Presented thus, the picture seems almost to be a parody. Theologians who uphold the traditional view would be quick to remark that, helpful as the picture presented above may be, it should not be taken literally. God's essence, they would contend, cannot be expressed within the categories available to us; much of what we

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say about God is, of necessity, symbolic. But the idea of a mighty being in the sky remains, no matter what caveats are sounded in order to lend sophistication to the idea.

The traditional western concept of God is, in essence, a remarkably primitive one. Tillich's concept of God is not a refinement of the traditional model. His description of God transcends the familiar conception. Tillich's appreciation of the importance of upholding God's infinity has led him to reject the idea that God is a being at all. A being is a finite entity, subject to forces and influences beyond itself. God cannot be subject to the categories of finitude, so he cannot be a being. Tillich describes God as "being-itself", a term which requires a wide and detailed exegesis. In the meantime, a few preliminary remarks must be made about the meaning of "being-itself".

At a simple level, the term implies a reality which is all-embracing. It does not imply (and neither does pantheism), that God is the totality of everything there is. But what is implied is that God is the source of everything there is, that it is he who sustains the universe, and that somehow he is directly present within his creation.

Even from this minimal definition, it can be seen that Tillich's doctrine of God differs significantly from the conventional one. Clearly the notion of God's immanence, his nearness to his creation, is something which will be important in Tillich's model. What is also clearly evident at this stage is that the concept "being-itself" is going to be a difficult one to attach a concrete



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meaning to. It sounds abstract and vague. It must be decided whether Tillich is able to render it explicable and accessible.

At this juncture it may well appear certain that Tillich has moved beyond biblical theism, beyond the biblical conception of God. The issue, though, is certainly not clear-cut. It is undeniably true that Tillich rejects the traditional doctrine of God, but this traditional doctrine is not the only doctrine one can derive from the Scriptures. Amongst the theologians, too, have been those who have described God in terms compatible with the idea of "being-itself". Indeed, Catholic tradition implies the doctrine that God is "ipsum esse" [Tillich in O'Meara & Weisser, p 308, 1964] but then, in contradictory fashion, defines God as a being whose existence can be demonstrated by way of deductive reasoning. Tillich maintains that the concept of God as being-itself is present within Christian theology, but has been suppressed and virtually forgotten.

This suppressed tradition which Tillich has uncovered, and on which he elaborates, is not an anti-theistic tradition. This point requires continued emphasis, for a superficial examination of the issue may render the opposite opinion; Ott, for example, labels Tillich a post-theist [Ott, p 6, 1975] and Tillich himself writes of the need to transcend theism [Tillich, CTB, pp 176-179, 1979]. However, despite the apocalyptic tone adopted by Tillich in The Courage to Be, it is always a false or limited theism which Tillich disparages. The God-above-God whom Tillich seeks to reveal is not a new God but the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The point is that Tillich is not trying to move beyond theism; he is trying to help us rediscover its concrete meaning.

Tillich found an audience. One of its members was John Robinson, Bishop of Worlwich. Robinson's Honest to God was published in 1963 and received widespread attention in the media. Robinson frankly admitted to an undercurrent of dissatisfaction with traditional religion in England (and in the western world generally). In his analysis of the prevailing concept of God, Robinson re-iterated familiar Tillichian themes: God was conceived anthropomorphically; he was seen as a person located in the sky; he was seen as an enthroned lawgiver and judge who, at the same time, acted with the kindness befitting a concerned and loving father. God was seen, then, as a being like us, though infinitely superior because perfect. Robinson rejected this traditional portrait of God. The attention Robinson's book received from the media and the public indicated, perhaps, the necessity of what Robinson termed the "reluctant revolution". [Robinson, p 11, 1963]

It was Tillich's concept of God which Robinson advanced. Robinson sought to translate Tillich into the language of the layman. The God-concept presented was held to be more credible in the modern world. The unexpectedly enthusiastic response to Honest to God suggested that the bishop had struck a chord with the assertion that traditional theism lacked impact for the average man. This view was enhanced when a follow-up publication, The Honest to God Debate appeared. This book included letters from members of the public; from these letters it became clear that Robinson had met the problems and difficulties of a number of estranged believers. Sincere gratitude was expressed by those who felt that their faith had been restored to them. There were, of course, dissenting voices. [Edwards & Robinson, pp 50-81, 1963]

Honest to God also prompted a widespread response from scholars and clergymen. Every serious religious thinker was forced to reconsider the basic theological question: the meaning of the word "God". The scholarly response to Honest to God revealed a wide division of opinion on the religious contribution of Paul Tillich. Remarks varied from the laudatory to the bland dismissal of Tillich as incomprehensible. Whatever their responses, those scholars not familiar with Paul Tillich became aware of him as a theologian radically active in the key theological issue of our time.

If the traditional concept of God has largely broken down, as this writer believes it has, then Paul Tillich stands at the forefront of the new theology. One gains the impression nowadays that the question of the nature of God has been put in temporary abeyance. Right at present, Tillich is not considered to be particularly important. Rubenstein's view seems to have acquired a large measure of acceptance. He writes: "He (Tillich) had spoken for and to his time, but we have moved beyond that time." [Rubenstein, AA, p 206, 1966] But this simply cannot be so. The challenge Tillich issues to traditional theism cannot be ignored. The questions raised in the "Honest to God" debate have by no means been satisfactorily answered. The issues will have to be addressed again, in the not too distant future.

An interesting issue is the one concerning whether the public should be directly involved in contentious theological debate. Robinson was chided by many religious thinkers who felt that the church had been weakened through Robinson's exposure of his own religious

doubts to the general populace. One such critic wrote of Honest to God:

... really the book is not intended for everyone. All parsons should read it and all well-educated laymen who are interested in Christianity. Other people may well be more hindered than helped by the tentative exploratory, question-raising nature of the book. Before a new restatement of the Christian faith can be offered to ordinary men and women who are seeking faith for daily living, a long theological task lies before the scholars of the Christian churches. Until then ordinary Christians must use the old categories in their prayers and in their preaching, allowing their lives to bear witness to the truth. [Bryan Green, Rector of Birmingham, in Edwards & Robinson, p 89, 1963]

This passage is interesting, for it takes seriously the view that a new restatement of faith may be necessary. Yet the tone is one of caution. The idea expressed is that in times of theological flux, theologians should retreat behind closed doors until issues have been thrashed out and a unified doctrine can be presented to a vulnerable public. Radical theologians, such as Tillich, find this position unacceptable.

Tillich categorises our age as the age of doubt and meaninglessness. [Tillich, CTB, p 168, 1979] Any effective theology, then, must address itself directly to real feelings of doubt and emptiness. It is thus wrong to regard clerical admissions of doubt negatively. "The dynamics of faith," writes Tillich, "are the dynamics of man's ultimate concern." [Tillich, DF, p 1, 1957] The state of ultimate concern demands an absolute commitment to truth; the theologian who experiences doubt is certainly justified in sharing this doubt with his congregation. Together the pastor and his congregation must seek the courage of faith, courage which holds in the face of abiding uncertainties. Tillich's doctrine of God is the result of radical questioning and leads us beyond traditional concepts.

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Courage involves risk; theologians must, of necessity, display the courage of theological exploration if the religious questions of modern man are to be addressed. The courage to further the debate of God in radical fashion is one factor which makes Tillich and Robinson natural allies. Both know the importance of acknowledging and meeting doubts. "Doubt," says Tillich, "is the necessary tool of knowledge." [Tillich, CTB, p 121, 1979]

There is, in any case, something most unsatisfactory about dividing the population up into those who may confront serious religious issues and those who may not. This attitude gives credence to the view that religious intellectuals are afraid to reveal religious controversies to the general public because, if they did so, the worshipping members of the general public would lose their faith. Such an attitude would indicate that the intellectuals feel that faith rests on very tenuous evidence. Edward Bond, indeed, believes that the time is near when only intellectuals will be able to have faith:

There will always be some people sophisticated enough to do the mental gymnastics needed to reconcile science and religion. But the mass of people will never be able to do this, and as we live in an industrial society they will be educated in the scientific tradition. This means that in future religion will never be more than the opium of the intellectuals. [Bond, p 8, 1973]

This scenario underestimates the strength of the religious impulse in man, yet it serves as an apposite warning to churchmen, especially Protestant churchmen. Today one expects to find a high degree of respect for the individual religious conscience. But such a principle can only be upheld when a measure of faith is placed in the powers of interpretation of ordinary people. Such faith may not be misplaced: "... the public is not quite so low-minded as

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some Christians appear to reckon." [Evening Standard, 9/4/63; Edwards & Robinson, p 40, 1963] We cannot afford to return to a time when religious truth is the prerogative of the scholastic minority. A policy of openness must be adopted by clergymen; partnership must preclude tutelage. No other attitude is permissible in the 20th century.

It will require a certain amount of courage from men of faith to face up to the challenges of radical theology, and acknowledge the validity of much of what is being said. The central problem of the nature of God is a problem which requires clarification. The Judeo-Christian tradition is as strong as its God-concept. If the old theistic model no longer satisfies, then a more accessible model must be constructed. Uncertainty on the concept of God reduces theism's power and its prestige. Sensing theological uncertainty, Russell comments that the concept of God has become "paler and paler, until it is difficult to see what people mean when they assert that they believe in God." [Russell, p 32, 1975] One response to this state of affairs is to deplore the attempts of radical theologians to re-interpret the God concept; this response results very often in an attempt by theologians to restore the power of the traditional theistic picture. Such a stance is not necessarily a reactionary one, although this writer questions its wisdom from both a theological and a practical viewpoint. At the very least, traditional theism will have to concede important points to its critics. Certainly Tillich's critique of traditional theism has a validity that can scarcely be denied. This critique will ensure a perceptible theological shift. The full impact of Tillich's work is yet to be felt. It is certainly incorrect to assert that Tillich's doctrine of God will evoke only minor interest in the

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future. Rollo May believes that Tillich's eclipse will be only temporary, that Tillich will be rediscovered and revalued as an important religious thinker. [May, p 92, 1973] Scholars acquainted with the "Honest to God" debate can only agree with this viewpoint.



CHAPTER TWOGOD AS BEING-ITSELF2.1. An infinite God

Paul Tillich rejects anthropomorphic concepts of God. God is often conceived of in anthropomorphic terms. Anthropomorphism entails the attribution of human characteristics to God. In violation of the concept of divine transcendence, God is given a very human type of personality. In the Old Testament he is even depicted as engaging in physical activities. God walks in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:8) and wrestles with Jacob (Gen 32:24). God is presented as uncertain with respect to choosing a course of action (Gen 18:17) and can be bargained with (Gen 18:24f). He is seen as being emotionally vulnerable, grieving over man's sinfulness, while regretting making man in the first place! (Gen 6:6). He is also seen as sanctioning and directing military conquest (Judges 1:2). In these cases human activities and predispositions are being projected onto the image of God as Supreme Being. Anthropomorphic projections may be useful when applied symbolically<sup>1</sup> (e.g. the comparison between a loving human father and the idea of God as loving father of mankind.). Literal anthropomorphisms, though, reflect a primitive religious consciousness and modern theism should reject such anthropomorphisms.

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<sup>1</sup> It is not always clear whether a writer means a statement to be literal or symbolic e.g. "At the breath of God the ice-sheet is formed, and the wide waters are frozen hard as iron". [Job 37:10; NEB]



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Another less obviously primitive religious conception is the one which seeks to locate God spatially within a set locale or realm. Biblical writers conceived of a three-tiered universe with heaven above, the earth below and the waters under the earth. After Copernicus and Galileo this model changed to one in which God was no longer seen as being "up there" but "out there" in space - a cosmic being out in some galaxy. Such a conception is still held by many to be the correct one. For those who cannot see beyond this conception, but are aware of its limitations, the existence of God seems to be an impossibility:

"...the number of people who instinctively seem to feel that it is no longer possible to believe in God in the space-age shows how crudely physical much of this thinking about a God 'out there' has been. Until the last recesses of the cosmos had been explored or were capable of being explored (by radio-telescope if not by rocketry), it was still possible to locate God mentally in some terra incognita. But now it seems there is no room for him... in the entire universe: for there are no vacant places left." [Robinson, pp 13-14, 1963]

Tillich would agree that God, so conceived, should be rejected. The atheist, Tillich holds, is justified in rejecting the concept of God as a finite being located somewhere in the vastness of creation. [Tillich, ST I, p 271, 1955] But does theism expect of us that we subscribe to the above-mentioned anthropomorphisms and crude spatial conceptions? What is theism, exactly? The theistic concept of God is that concept of God which fits the Judeo-Christian religious understanding. For a definition of theism one turns to religious scholars, not to the Bible. The Bible does not present a systematic or consistent concept of God. Henotheism preceded monotheism in ancient Hebrew religion; the New Testament appropriates the Logos doctrine of the Stoics [Tillich, HCT, p 7, 1968] by which to explain the ultimate principle of rational law in the universe. Biblical writers were not so much concerned with defining

God as with locating him within terms expressing his relationship with man. So God is symbolically described as King, Father, Supreme Governor, Judge of All, Searcher of Hearts, etc. His nature may also be discovered through words and deeds attributed to him. The theologians' task has been to weld the disparate titles, words and actions into a coherent picture. The theistic picture is a creative scholarly invention. If we appreciate this, we appreciate that this picture is subject to challenge and alteration. In challenging the traditional concept of God, Paul Tillich is exercising the theologian's right to formulate or re-formulate doctrine.<sup>2</sup> Creative theological thought, though, should be circumscribed by a concern for the protection of that which is essential in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Is it possible to say exactly what such essentials are?

H.P. Owen provides the following definition of theism: "Theism may be defined as belief in one God, the Creator, who is infinite, self-existent, incorporeal, immutable, impassible, simple, perfect, omniscient and omnipotent." [Owen, p 1, 1971] As a general summary of theological opinion, this definition is a good one. Of course, the elements listed require explanation, and Tillich's concept of God as "being-itself" is built around the terms "infinite" and "incorporeal". There is nothing in Owen's definition which Tillich would argue with but he would seek to explore the suppressed definition of God which is detectable within Owen's definition.

The idea that God is incorporeal is in contradistinction to anthropomorphic conceptions of God. Having a material body would

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<sup>2</sup> This principle is, of course, far more powerful in Protestantism than in Catholicism.

limit God, whose infinity must be upheld at all times. Thus Owen: "If God is an infinite or self-existent being he must be incorporeal (for matter is intrinsically limiting)..." [Owen, p 17, 1971] The infinite category most protected by the idea of God's incorporeality is that of God's omnipresence; God's aseity (self-existence) is also protected by the idea of incorporeality since matter cannot be held to be prior to or co-existent with God. So incorporeality is essential. And, at this stage, the tentative point can be made that this notion of God's incorporeality is easier to embrace if God is defined as being-itself rather than as a being, albeit the most perfect being. But the concept of being-itself will be examined in detail later.

The presupposition of God's infinity lies at the centre of Tillich's doctrine of God. W.L. Rowe distinguishes between this doctrine's religious and philosophical aspect: "The religious aspect is expressed by the statement 'God is that which concerns man ultimately' (ST, 1:211). The philosophical aspect of his doctrine of God is expressed by the statement 'God is being-itself' (ST, 1:235)." [Rowe, p 11, 1968] Tillich starts with man's existential situation. Man, at the deepest level of his existence, experiences an ultimate concern, which leads him to seek communion with the source or ground of his ultimate concern. But a finite being, especially one conceived of anthropomorphically, cannot inspire reverence. Only the infinite ground of all being can meet the need of ultimate concern.

Because God is infinite, we need to use a new category of being when describing him. Any being, no matter how superlatively described, remains an entity amongst other. Hence Tillich's insistence that God is not a being but "being-itself":

The being of God is being-itself. The being of God cannot be understood as the existence of a being alongside others or above others. If God is a being, he is subject to the categories of finitude, especially to space and substance. Even if he is called the "highest being" in the sense of the "most perfect" and the "most powerful" being, this situation is not changed. When applied to God, superlatives become diminutives. They place him on the level of other beings while elevating him above all of them. [Tillich, ST I, p 261, 1955]

## 2.2. God and "exists"

To be a being, then, is to be finite, and Tillich will not compromise on God's infinity. But if God is not a being with a spatial and substantial existence, in what sense are we to speak of God "existing"? How are we to relate his existence (his being in reality) to his essence (his intrinsic nature)? Tillich argues that God's existence cannot be separated from his essence, for this would involve a logical absurdity: "An existence of God which is not united with its essence is a contradiction in terms. It makes God a being whose existence does not fulfil his essential potentialities; being and not-yet-being are 'mixed' in him, as they are in everything finite. God ceases to be God, the ground of being and meaning." [Tillich, ST I, p 262, 1955]

Thus, Tillich locates God within a different category to other finite objects; he is that in which there is no split between existence and essence. So God does not first exist, and then realise his true nature; nor does the true nature of God bring God into being. Such ideas are absurd. The term "God", properly understood, implies an indivisibility of existence and essence.

This reasoning leads to a much quoted and much misunderstood statement of Tillich's, namely that one cannot say that God "exists". Tillich makes this statement in a passage in which existence is contrasted with essence. Tillich, as a Christian theist, does not deny the reality of God. Taken in context, Tillich's statement need cause no alarm. His intention is to protect the notion of God's infinity. He is making an academic point and has no intention of undermining theistic faith. Tillich writes:

The scholastics were right when they asserted that in God there is no difference between essence and existence. But they perverted their insight when in spite of this assertion they spoke of the existence of God and tried to argue in favour of it. Actually they did not mean "existence". They meant the reality, the validity, the truth of the idea of God, an idea which did not carry the connotation of something or someone who might or might not exist... God does not exist. He is being-itself beyond essence and existence. [Tillich, ST I, p 227, 1955]

So the reality which is God is not one reality amongst others, but is that which is the source and basis of all being. So, as Hick points out, Tillich restricts the terms "exists" to the finite and created realm: "...It is only on the basis of this restricted usage that Tillich repudiates the statement that God exists." [Hick, PR, p 7, 1973] So Tillich is not denying God; he is radically reformulating the way we are to think of him. God is not a being; he is being-itself.

### 2.3. Being-itself as opposed to supranaturalism and naturalism

At this stage it is necessary to look more closely at the concept of being-itself. The term does not have a ready meaning for the layman or even for the philosopher. Tillich explains being-itself by way of contrast with two other interpretations of God which he

considers to be invalid. These are the supranaturalistic and naturalistic interpretations.

Supranaturalism is the concept of God, already considered, whereby God is separated from the creation as a being, the highest being, who "brings the universe into being at a certain moment... governs it according to a plan, directs it toward an end, interferes with its ordinary processes in order to overcome resistance and to fulfil his purpose, and will bring it to consummation in a final catastrophe." [Tillich, ST II, p 6, 1957] As shown before, this violates the central principle of infinity with respect to God: spatially, by the postulation of a supranatural divine world alongside the natural human one; temporally, by fixing a beginning and an end to God's creativity; causatively, by making God one cause alongside others; in respect of substance because individual substance is attributed to God. Against such a view, Tillich claims, the criticisms of naturalism are valid.

Naturalism identifies God with the universe. This does not imply that God is the totality of everything there is, but rather, God is the power and meaning of reality. He is nature's creative ground. This conception of God, however, fails to separate sufficiently the finite and the infinite. The "creative nature" of which Tillich speaks, this "creative ground of all natural objects" may well be interpreted in the sense of "universe" without giving it the special characteristics of godhead, of divinity. Naturalism presupposes a "nature" above the totality of natural objects, but such a conception is neutral with respect to character and teleology. A third way becomes necessary, a way which presents the transcendent power of the supranaturalistic conception, the

immanent power of the naturalistic conception, and which affirms the theistic God of the Christian tradition.

The third conception is the one in which God is called "being-itself". As in the naturalistic view, God is the creative ground of everything that has being, that is "absolute or unconditioned Being in which all finite beings participate and from which they are derived". [Owen, p 124, 1971] But the divine ground of being, unlike in naturalism, is the "transcendens", a term which indicates that the divine ground transcends every individual being and the totality of beings.

So being-itself is that eternal but dynamic spiritual force which unrelentingly sustains creativity against the possibility of nothingness (or non-being). God empowers everything in creation, and all beings participate in this "power of being", yet God retains a transcendent aspect which prevents him from being merely nature or the universe. Further, this ground of being of creative "substance" is the bearer of meaning. Unlike in naturalism, the divine ground must have an intellectual base: "Reality is understandable because its divine ground has the character of intellect. Knowledge is possible only because the divine intellect is the ground of everything." [Tillich, HCT, p 189, 1968]. This, then, is the concept of being-itself in rough outline. As has been said, this concept is a difficult one, and it must be decided if the term "being-itself" has a clear meaning.

#### 2.4. The grammar of being



Ontology is the branch of metaphysics which deals with the nature of being:

... ontology asks the simple and infinitely difficult question: What does it mean to be? What are the structures, common to everything that is, to everything that participates in being? One cannot avoid this question by denying that there are such common structures. One cannot deny that being is one and that the qualities and elements of being constitute a texture of connected and conflicting forces. This texture is one, in so far as it is and gives the power of being to each of its qualities and elements... Ontology characterises the texture of being itself, which is effective in everything that is, in all beings, living and dead, subhuman and human.  
[Tillich, LPJ, pp 19-20 1969]

The problem with a passage such as this one, a problem pointed out by philosophical linguists such as Garnett and Hooke, is that being-itself is presented as a quality shared by beings. Being-itself is "effective in everything that is" i.e. in some sense the power and creative energy of being indwells each individual being. Garnett's criticism of Tillich is that Tillich has misunderstood the logical function of the verb "to be"; the verb cannot be used descriptively, as though something is being predicated of someone when one says that that person "is" or "exists".<sup>3</sup> [In MacQuarrie, TCRT, pp 275 & 367, 1981] The very same point is made in the criticism of Anselm's ontological argument, that existence (or being) cannot be listed amongst the attributes of a being; when one thinks of a being, one already thinks of it as existing. Thus

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<sup>3</sup> It may be counter-argued that exactly such a predicative usage is found in the Tetragrammaton of Exodus 3:14. God, identifying himself to Moses says: "I am who I am." The name of Yahweh came to be associated with the Hebrew verb hyh or hwh meaning "to be". Whether the connection was intentional or not, it can be argued that the statement of God to Moses is a statement which implies that God is being-itself or he who "lets-be" [MacQuarrie, PCT, pp 196-197, 1977]. The nominalist would be prepared to accept this description insofar as it implies God's creative activity. He would, though, be unprepared to consider seeing God as that quality or power infusing material beings. Such a conception is outside of the nominalist framework.



Hick writes, "To say of X that it exists is not to say that in addition to its various other attributes it has the attribute of existing, but is to say that there is an X in the real world." [Hick, PR, p 19, 1973] This is certainly true of the ordinary way in which the verb "to be" is used, so it is hard to go along with a view that seeks to locate a quality or substance called "being" within individual beings. At times (and the above quotation is an example), Tillich uses the verb "to be" predicatively: "When Tillich takes it for granted that 'is' and 'are' may be applied to all the things in the world, he seems to be assuming that the words 'is' and 'are' are the grammatical predicates of the sentences in which they occur." [Macleod, p 96, 1973]

Of course, as Macleod further points out, Tillich might be seeking to recover the true meaning of the verb "to be" and thus could claim to be indifferent to its ordinary usage. [Macleod, p 96] Certain philosophical models could permit such a usage, but these models would be unacceptable to the prevailing western mode of thought, which is nominalistic. Tillich's main detractors use nominalistic arguments to criticise his concept of God.

Nominalists find Tillich's concept of God meaningless. Nominalism is the philosophical school which holds that there are no universals existing independently of the actual occurrence of things (so, for example, there are trees but there is no meta-reality of "trethood"). This mode of thinking, when related to ontological concerns, results in the following argument: the universe contains many things which exist, but that does not mean that there is a quality or reality called "existence-itself"; there is no such thing as "being", only beings. How, asks Ayer, would the philoso-

pher "depict the whole of reality except through the depiction of its parts"? [Ayer, p 3, 1981]

Flew takes the same view as Ayer in God and Philosophy. He claims that God must be identifiable in some way and he dismisses the concept of being-itself as an abstraction. Identification is crucial to an empiricist such as Flew: "It has got to be shown how what is specified in our definition of the word God could, in principle, be identified" [Flew, p 36, 1966] for Flew, this identification is dependent on God's being an individual, a being: "If God is not even alleged to be this (an individual) he cannot be any sort of agent, much less an all-powerful will." (p 34).

The nominalist position is also taken contra Tillich by Heywood Thomas, who draws on McTaggart's criticism of metaphysics. One of Heywood Thomas's recurring criticisms of Tillich is that Tillich relies on metaphysics, and metaphysics is no longer respectable: "The sin of any philosophy is not so much that it is wrong as that it is out of date and it can become a commonplace of our philosophical talk to say that metaphysics is out of date." [Heywood Thomas, p 35, 1963] McTaggart defines metaphysics as "the systematic study of the nature of ultimate reality" (p 35); Heywood Thomas is not convinced that one can meaningfully talk of ultimate reality at all. One apprehends realities, he argues, but cannot extrapolate universals from these:

The only use that the phrase "being-itself" can be said to have is that of a shorthand expression for the manifoldness of beings. Therefore to speak of "being-itself" is something over and above particular beings is to commit a category mistake. It is very like the man who, on being shown the Colleges of Cambridge, asks, "But where is the University?" [p 36]

This, then is the nominalistic position: the universe is the sum total of its parts. Either God is one of these "parts" (the greatest "part") or he does not exist.

#### 2.5. Tillich's attitude to nominalism

Tillich basically rejects the nominalist way of thinking, although he admits its value as a safeguard against Asiatisation (or collectivisation). [Tillich, HCT, p 144, 1968] For Tillich, nominalism is the cause of most difficulties in contemporary philosophy and theology. So he writes: "There is hardly a day that I do not fight against nominalism on the basis of my comparatively mediaeval realistic kind of thinking, which conceives of being as power of being." [Tillich, HCT, p 143, 1968] Against nominalism, Tillich supports the view of mediaeval realism, as opposed to modern-day "realism", which is something different: "The word 'realism' means today almost what 'nominalism' meant in the Middle Ages, while the 'realism' of the Middle Ages expresses almost exactly what we call 'idealism' today. It might be suggested that, whenever one speaks of classical realism, one should call it 'mystical realism'." [Tillich, ST I, p 197, 1955] It is this classical or mystical realism which Tillich asserts against the nominalist view:

The word "realism" indicates that the universals, the essential structures of things, are the really real in them. "Mystical realism" emphasises participation of the individual in the universal and the participation of the knower in the known. In this respect realism is correct and able to make knowledge understandable. But it is wrong if it establishes a second reality and makes of the structure of participation a level of being in which individuality and personality disappear. [Tillich, ST I, p 197, 1955]

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Tillich, at the same time, rejects the "extreme realism" of Plato, who regarded universals as special things existing in a "world of forms" i.e. constituting a duplicate, although primordial, reality. [Tillich, HCT, pp 142-3, 1968] Rather, things possess structures which man can apprehend, which render the things recognisable and knowable. For Tillich, knowledge involves the "participation of the knower in the known", which means that the mind of man perceives the structures of objects, structures which owe their genesis, presumably, to the creative activity of the divine mind. Knowledge, then, involves a meeting of divine and human consciousness; man apprehends structures conceived by divine mind - structures brought into being, through manifest beings, by virtue of divine creativity: "Even the empiricist must acknowledge that everything approachable by knowledge must have the structure of 'being knowable'. And this structure includes by definition a mutual participation of the knower and the known." [Tillich, ST I, p 177, 1955] So the subject-object split between God and man is overcome through a union of cognition.

This reminds one of the mystical notion, common to both Spinoza and Hegel, that one's knowledge of God is the knowledge God has of himself. God, as it were, contemplates himself through the minds of men. Man's knowledge and appreciation of universals, essences, structures is a result of God's informative infusion of human mind. Such a view establishes the intrinsic inseparability of God and man. Tillich seems to imply such a view when he writes: "Knowledge is union and... is rooted in the eros which reunites elements which essentially belong to each other." [Tillich, ST I, p 195, 1955] The

idea of participation is central to Tillich's thinking.<sup>4</sup> Rowe argues that Tillich uses the idea in different ways, but fails to explain on any occasion exactly what he means by it. In the case of participation of knowledge, Rowe formulates this interpretation: "To claim that knowledge is participation is to claim that there is some universal shared by both the knower and the known, it is to claim that some universal exists and characterises both knower and object known." [Rowe, p 54, 1968] This needs to be more precisely expressed. Rowe appears to be postulating a universal reality exterior to God, by which God and man are characterised. If that in which man participates is external to the divine ground, then a further reality exists apart from the finite world and its divine ground. Because Tillich asserts that a being participates in being-itself, we cannot speak of a shared universal unless the universal proceeds from the divine. But such a universal cannot have an independent existence exterior to the divine; the divine itself is the universal in which man participates.

This rider accepted, is Rowe not correct in asserting that a union of cognition implies some kind of substantial unity between God and man? Does one not need a category to explain how God and man "essentially belong to each other"?<sup>5</sup> Certainly the idealist model would provide a cogent interpretation of what Tillich means by "participation", for it uses the category of "spirit" to unite re-

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<sup>4</sup> On page 196 of Systematic Theology Volume I, Tillich gives six examples of the function of the concept of participation.

<sup>5</sup> The answers to these questions appear in the long footnote on p 64.

alities of being and meaning within one substance. An exploratory model seems necessary since Tillich's concept of God cannot be understood simply in terms of mystical realism; Tillich is insistent that being-itself cannot be expressed within the categories of nominalism and realism. [Tillich, ST II, p 12, 1957] The idealist model is suggested by many elements in Tillich's thought.

Idealism is the "philosophical position holding that the basic category of reality is spirit (or mind) and virtually excluding the notion of 'thing in itself'." [Deist, p 78, 1984] If there is a basic category of reality, then it can be used as a predicate; this helps to resolve the problem of making sense of Tillich's predicative use of "existence". If the basic category of reality is spirit (conceived of dynamically, and possessing consciousness), then some sense can be made of Tillich's talk of the existent participating in existence-itself, and of the knower participating in the known. The idealist model provides a means of defining "participation".

It also provides a way of understanding the terms "power of being" and "ground of being" used by Tillich when elaborating on the concept of being-itself. "Power of being" implies an energetic, dynamic and creative force at work within the natural world and, possibly, within material objects. "Ground of being" implies some sort of "ground substance", something of which objects are comprised, something common to being. Idealism, given this

pantheistic sense, allows us a way of dealing with key Tillichian terms.<sup>6</sup>

Tillich's rejection of pantheism will be examined later, but at this stage we should take note of some laudatory remarks in pantheism's direction. Tillich asserts that a pantheistic element is necessary in every adequate doctrine of God. [Tillich in O'Meara, p 308, 1964] In Systematic Theology I, Tillich writes: "The pantheistic element in the classical doctrine that God is ipsum esse, being-itself, is as necessary for a Christian doctrine of God as the mystical element of the divine presence." [Tillich, ST I, p 259, 1955] This pantheistic element is important because it guards against an exclusively nominalist approach. Tillich shows some appreciation for the monistic view when he rejects pantheism's "heresy label" [Tillich, ST I, p 258, 1955].

Other reasons for drawing up an idealist model by which to translate Tillich are: Tillich, a self-professed "mystical realist", notes the closeness of realism and idealism. [Tillich, HCT, p 198, 1968]; further, as stated earlier, the concept of being-itself transcends nominalist and realist categories [Tillich, ST II, p 12, 1957]; finally, the idealist model seems the most likely one to

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<sup>6</sup> Idealism and pantheism are very close, but the two terms are not interchangeable. Spinoza (a pantheist) speaks of one eternal substance, with the attributes of mind and extension (matter). [See Tillich, HCT, p 370, 1968] Hegel (an idealist) holds that Spirit is the eternal substance which exists prior to matter, but which brings matter into being as Spirit's dialectical opposite. Tillich explains Hegel's position as follows: "All life processes are manifestations of the divine life, only they appear in time and space whereas in God they are in their essential nature." [ibid, p 417] In effect, both Hegel and Spinoza share the belief that the power of God infuses matter, but their explanations for this differ significantly.



render a meaning for the extremely difficult concept of being-itself; a sphere of reference is essential in this regard.

## 2.6. An idealist model for being-itself

Tillich, along with the idealist, rejects nominalist thinking. Idealism is anti-nominalist because it expands the realistic notion of universals into the notion of an all-embracing universal, a basic category of reality which serves to unify reality. Thus the principle identity is central to idealist thinking. It explains the unity of subject and object (man and God) and, more broadly, it provides a basis for understanding the principle of universal unity:

The principle of identity says that the one substance... makes togetherness possible in the same time and the same space. Without the one substance there could not be causal connections between things, and there couldn't be substantial union and separation of different substances. [Tillich, HCT, p 440, 1968]

In idealism the unifying substance is spirit or mind; conscious spirit, if one wishes to retain both. Spirit is a useful category to use in understanding being-itself. Nominalist empiricists wish to discover God in a specific physical locus. But God, according to Tillich, is not an object in creation, nor is he the sum of all things. So perhaps an analysis of being-itself should lead us out of the world of physical phenomena into the world of spirit. Being-itself could then be defined in terms of a union of spirit and consciousness.

The idea of God as spirit is, of course, biblical: "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John 4:24, NEB). Tillich outlines the doctrine of God as spirit,



in the idealist context, by referring to the God-concept of Hegel. The following passage outlines the position of idealist monism with respect to the nature of God:

Spirit is the creator of man as personality and of everything which through man as person can be created in culture, religion and morality. This human spirit is the self-manifestation of the divine Spirit, and God is the absolute Spirit which is present and works through every finite spirit... All life processes are manifestations of the divine life, only they appear in time and space whereas in God they are in their essential nature. God actualises his own potentialities in time and space, through nature, through history, and through men. God finds himself in his personal character in man and his history, in the different forms of his historical actualisation. God is not a person besides other persons. The absolute Spirit of which Hegel speaks is not a being beside the finite spirit, but in God its essential reality is given. In time and space it becomes actualised, yet at the same time estranged from its essential character. [Tillich, HCT, p 417, 1968]

By this theory, then, we possess an element - a creative, dynamic and energising force - outside of the realities of mind and body. By Hegel's theory we can understand our "participation" in God by virtue of our possession of the divine Spirit under the restrictive conditions of existence. Spirit, then, is the point of identity between man and God; man's yearning for the eternal and unconditional is to be explained in terms of the category of the eternal within him - "the absolute Spirit which is present and works through every finite spirit".

Rubenstein believes that the God-concepts of Hegel and Tillich have much in common. He sees the main difference lying in the terminology used: "Hegel calls the divine ground Geist or Spirit. Paul Tillich preferred to use the term ground of being " [Rubenstein, ME, p 190, 1970] He clearly believes that Tillich is an Idealist,

whose God-concept corresponds closely to the one outlined by Hegel in the Preface to The Phenomenology of Mind.

Spirit is alone reality. It is the inner being of the world, that which essentially is, and is per se; it assumes objective, determinate form and enters into relations with itself - it is externality (otherness) and exists for self; yet, in this determinateness, and in its otherness, it is still one with itself - it is self-contained and self-complete, in itself and for itself at once... [Hegel, p 86, 1966]]

This is idealistic monism, the doctrine that all creation compromises the divine Spirit. Rubenstein contrasts this doctrine with the traditional one, the one rejected by Tillich.

Terms like ground and source stand in contrast to the terms used for the biblical God of history. The biblical God is a father-God. He is a creator, a judge, a maker. When he creates, he does so with substances external to his own nature. God as ground and source creates as does a mother, out of her own substance. [Rubenstein, ME, p 190, 1970]

Rubenstein believes Tillich's doctrine of God as being-itself conforms to the latter description. Being-itself is thus given the character of "universal substance" and Tillich is placed firmly amongst the idealists (as we have seen) and the mystics: "Although I have cited Hegel and Tillich, I could have quoted a long line of Eastern and Western mystics who have had similar conceptions of God." [Rubenstein, ME, p 191, 1979] The wisdom of Rubenstein's assessment will be discussed in greater detail later. Suffice it to say at this stage that connections may be perceived between Hegel's idealism and Tillich's doctrine of God through Tillich's terms such as "ground" and "source" in connection with being-itself.

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<sup>7</sup> Rubenstein presents these two models in such a way as to imply that we need not choose between them. The possibility of a middle position is discussed in the next section.

In the Hegelian model, then, there is a very real identity between the divine and human spirit, but there is also a split, since absolute Spirit is pure essence and finite spirit is "restricted" or "tarnished" essence, as it were; spiritual essence under the unholy conditions of existence. Under these conditions finite spirit is dependent upon the informative influence of absolute Spirit. Our own finite spirit cannot give us the assurance that we are "of God". The courage needed to accept our finitude is not something generated by ourselves. The absolute Spirit communes with the finite spirit, effecting a union which brings knowledge - "the Spirit of God joins with our spirit in testifying that we are God's children" (Rom 8:16, NEB) - and conveys the ontological awareness of our being (in conjunction with the awareness of the possibility of non-being). [See Tillich, ST I, p 181, 1955] The spiritual estrangement implied in the Hegelian model is, then, overcome through the revelatory initiative of absolute Spirit.

It would be convenient simply to equate being with spirit at this stage, but this may not be done. Being is always defined in opposition to nothingness [Heidegger, p 28, 1959]; whatever is, has being. Most idealists would agree that "spirit" and "reality" are not synonymous;<sup>\*</sup> matter is a reality of the finite world: material objects have "being". So, provisionally, we can postulate a duality between matter and spirit within the all-embracing concept of being.

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<sup>\*</sup> In Hinduism, the Samkara and Advaita schools reject the idea that anything outside of God exists; the world is maya (illusion). [Sen, p 37, 1978]

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This is not a controversial distinction to make. Though everything that is has being, distinctions can be made in relation to degrees of being. Some entities are held to be more "beingful" than others. For example, MacQuarrie places angels above men in a hypothetical hierarchy of beings [MacQuarrie, PCT, pp 234-5, 1977]. These "ministrant spirits, sent out to serve" (Heb 1:14, NEB), it is implied, owe their superior "beingfulness" to their "spirituality"; idealists would argue that spirit is of a higher order than matter, more "beingful" as it were. Certain biblical passages support this view. For example, when Paul talks of the resurrection he formulates a doctrine of bodily reappearance, but this body is a "spiritual body". (I Cor. 15:44) Paul goes on to say that, "flesh and blood can never possess the kingdom of God" (I Cor 15:50, NEB), so we must conclude that a "spiritual body" is very different from an earthly one. Its superiority to the earthly body is asserted on the basis of the primacy of spirit over flesh.

In the idealist model, then, being-itself, to be pure being, must be spirit. But if material objects have being, then we cannot permit an absolute separation of spirit and matter. Matter cannot infuse spirit, but spirit can infuse matter. (The Word may become flesh [John 1:14] but not vice-versa.) God creates the world, infusing matter with the dynamic energy of spirit. Creation is the result of spirit; the spirit of God moves over the surface of the waters at the outset of creation (Gen 1:2). Creation is subsequently sustained and informed by spirit. This is more obvious in man than in nature, but Paul is determined that nature has its intuitive spirituality, which can be expressed as a longing for perfect reintegration with its divine ground: "The whole created

universe groans in all its parts as if in the pangs of childbirth."

[Rom 8:22, NEB]

Now this understanding of being and being-itself may throw light on Tillich's conception of God for it explains why being-itself may be immanent in and transcendent to the world, at once. In this model, being-itself is the creative force behind all that is, energising it, giving it its character, but is not identical with it. The Hebrew word for spirit, ruah, best expresses it; spirit is a breath or wind that infuses everything (as an invisible but tangible force) but which is not identified with the totality of everything.<sup>9</sup> To possess "being" in the finite world is to possess spirit within one's material structure. Being-itself, in the idealist model, is absolute Spirit; it is never matter (God is incorporeal) but is present as energising power within matter. Spirit is superior to matter, but matter is not opposed to spirit, but is able to contain it and reflect it. Explained in this way, the concept of being-itself may be given content, so as to render it intelligible.

This doctrine of monistic idealism may also be described as "essentialism" [Tillich, HCT, pp 438-439, 1968] because God is the bearer of the essential structures of all things. The essence of reality is spirit, intrinsic to God as absolute Spirit; absolute Spirit predetermines the essential nature of man, the bearer of the divine Spirit. The notion that man is created in God's image (Gen

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<sup>9</sup> Psalm 139:7 reads "Where can I escape from thy spirit (ruah)? Where can I flee from thy presence?" This suggests God's omnipresence.

1:26) would then imply that God has placed his Spirit in man. Man can, then, never destroy that image (the reflection of God's Spirit) even if he chooses to define himself in opposition to what he perceives the will of God to be. This is so because God is not a being standing over against him; the rebellion against a false conception of God is only apparently meaningful. God qua Spirit, is the depth of every man's existence and in fact is nearer to man than man is to himself.<sup>10</sup>

The doctrine of essentialism is a philosophy which "tries to understand the essences in all things as expressions of the divine self-manifestation in time and space" and so "God in himself is the essence of every species of plant and animals, of the structure of atoms and stars, of the nature of man in which his innermost centre is manifest. All these are manifestations of the divine life as it is manifest in time and space". [Tillich, HCT, p 418, 1968] In other words the structures of nature are functions of the creative power of absolute Spirit. And so, following Hegel's thought:

The process in which God creates the world and fulfils himself in the world is the means whereby the infinite abundance of the divine life grows in time and space. God is not a separate entity, something finished in himself, but he belongs to the world, not as a part of it, but as the ground from which and to which all things exist. This is the synthesis of the divine and human spirit. It was the point most attacked by the nineteenth-century theology of religious revivalism, which wanted to emphasise the person-to-person relationship and the difference between God and the world. [Tillich, HCT, pp 418-9, 1968]

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<sup>10</sup> Indeed "nearer to everything than anything is to itself". [Luther's idea cited by Tillich, HCT, p 374, 1968]

Here, then, is a possible model for being-itself: the absolute Spirit (or being-itself) is said to actualise itself in time and space. The phrase "synthesis of the divine and human spirit" suggests a real identity between God and man, an identity which can be extended into the realms of nature. The immanent strand of Tillich's thought is given prominence in the idealist model through the union of the divine and human spirits. As the passage above also shows, the idealist model stands in direct contrast to the traditional concept of God as a being, a separate entity or person, whose transcendence implies a real separation between himself and the world. In typical Tillichian language, Hegel's God is described as the "ground" of all existence. The use of this familiar term (and others,<sup>11</sup> when dealing with Hegel's concept of God) shows Tillich's affinity with the idealist model.

There is a strong cognitive aspect to Hegel's concept of spirit ("Geist" is sometimes translated as "mind"). The idea of the intelligence and purposefulness of absolute Spirit dovetails with the conception of God as divine Logos (a term appropriated from Stoicism to explain God's creative and sustaining power as described in the first chapter of John's gospel. The words "Logos" indicating the rational nature of reality) and "Abyss" (indicating the inexhaustible and ineffable nature of reality) are joined in the overriding term "Spirit". [Tillich, ST I, p 173, 1955] The concept of absolute Spirit, then, is seen to possess the structures of rationality if interpreted according to the Logos doctrine.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, God is "creative power" (HCT, p 416), the "structure of reality" (p 418), but he is not a being (p 417) and not a person (p 418).



"Logos" is the Greek word for "reason" but also means "word". However, the term does not refer to revelatory words, but to a revelatory reality (i.e. "word" is not understood in a literal sense). Since the Logos is the "universal form and principle of everything created", it is said to be "in reality as a whole and in the human mind". [Tillich, HCT, p 326, 1968] The structure of being-itself is, thus, held to be rational, and man (who has the divine Spirit in the Idealist model) possesses a rational structure which is able to recognise and know the structure of reality. So being-itself becomes the bearer of being and meaning: "The universe has been created by an intelligent power, the divine ground, and since the world has been intelligently built, intelligence can grasp it. We can grasp the world intelligently because it has been created intelligently. It has a structure." [Tillich, HCT, p 326, 1968]

So then, the term "absolute Spirit" (as bearer of being and meaning) may be held to translate being-itself (i.e. finite spirit is part of divine Spirit). Also, the model allows us a way of conceiving of existence as a predicate; life-giving "spirit" can be seen as an attribute. Further, the idealist view seems to support Tillich's stress on God's immanence and his rejection of the concept of God as a distant being, a stranger to the world. The model seems to give scope to the "pantheistic principle" which Tillich considers important.

2.7. Tillich's rejection of the idealist model

There are times when Tillich comes close to embracing idealism; there are times when his attitude may be held to be fairly ambiguous; the doctrine of spirit which Tillich generally supports, though, involves a spiritual "correlation" rather than a spiritual "identity".

The idea of correlation is crucial in Tillich's thinking, and his Systematic Theology Volume I begins with the outline of its method. This method throws light on the issue of the relationship between the divine and human spirit. The Method of Correlation seeks to show the interdependence of philosophy and theology in that the philosophical questions raised by man in his existential situation, find their answers in the answers of theology. To be sure, faith is required when one asserts that theology provides the answers to philosophical questions. Tillich does not try to establish the correlation logically, but attempts to persuade us on the basis of the appropriateness and reasonableness of the theological answers: "His intention is to show that the Christian revelation is not contrary to reason but fulfils it by answering ultimate questions that reason can raise but cannot answer." [Thomas, p 393, 1965] Reality, for Tillich, is a closed system structured in such a way that man's rationality (but also spirituality and sentient nature) finds its basis and its fulfilment when allied to the divine rationality. The idea seems to be that God has structured reality in such a way that man's questions can only find an answer in him. The universe has a logos structure; man's ultimate concern finds fulfilment in being made aware of God who created the structures of reality, of which man may become aware: "The theologian turns

towards his existential situation to make clear the universal validity, the logos structure of what concerns him ultimately."

[Tillich, ST I, p 29, 1955]

The idea of correlation may also be applied to the category of spirit (which includes both the rational and mysterious elements of reality). Tillich's stress on God's immanence is given prominence in the described correlation:

Although I am not a mystical theologian,<sup>12</sup> I would say that I am more on the side of the theology of experience and inwardness, for I believe that the Spirit is in us. In the concept of Spirit the highest synthesis is given between the Word of God which occurs from the outside and the experience which occurs inside... The problem is the difference between the theology of the Word from the outside and the theology of inner experience, which is frequently but wrongly called "the inner Word". That is not a good term. "Inner light" is better. In modern terminology we speak of "existential experience". The point is that these two things are not mutually exclusive. The concept of the Spirit is the mediating power which overcomes the conflict between outside and inside. [Tillich, HCT, p 317, 1968]

This is a significant passage. At first, it looks as though Tillich is embracing the idealist view of identity - "I believe that the Spirit is in us" - but Tillich falls short of equating Spirit with being-itself. Rather, Spirit is seen as a category which God and

<sup>12</sup> Not primarily, perhaps, (if the term "mystical" is given a narrow definition) but elements of Tillich's theology are decidedly mystical in flavour, especially the realistic elements in his thought. This is pointed out by Ian Thompson, who writes: "He (Tillich) aligns himself with the mystical realists of the Franciscan school of 13th century scholasticism, such as Alexander of Hales, Bonaventura, and Matthew of Aquasparta, who developed the ontological line of the philosophy of religion. Of this tradition he says, 'The Augustinian tradition can rightly be called mystical, if mysticism is defined as the experience of the identity of subject and object in relation to Being itself.' (Tillich, TC, p 14 1969)" [Thompson, p 58, 1981] Tillich consistently aligns himself with the Augustinian tradition (see, for example, Tillich, HCT, p 104, 1968).

man have in common, and this category provides the means for divine-human communion or correlation. For the Word of God "occurs from the outside" while man's experience "occurs inside". Tillich's aim is to formulate a doctrine of spirit which shows that the "divine light" and man's "inner light" are of the same order of being, yet a distinction is maintained between Creator and creature. But the separateness of God and man is minimised because the human "inner light", man's spirit, is of divine origin and seeks communion with the divine or absolute Spirit. So "mutual exclusivity" is overcome via a communion of spirit; man meets God through the "mediating" power of Spirit.

This mutual exclusivity is, in especial instances, even more dramatically overcome. The pneumatological principle, to which Tillich ascribes, revolves around the idea that the Spirit of God can temporarily inhabit man, thus bringing him to a state of ecstasy:

If the divine Spirit breaks into the human spirit, this does not mean that it rests there, but that it drives the human spirit out of itself. The "in" of the divine Spirit is an "out" for the human spirit. The spirit, a dimension of finite life, is driven into a successful self-transcendence; it is grasped by something ultimate and unconditional. It is still the human spirit; it remains what it is, but at the same time, it goes out of itself under the impact of the divine Spirit. "Ecstasy" is the classical term for this state of being grasped by the Spiritual Presence. [Tillich, ST III, p 119, 1963]

This ecstatic state, though, is not of long duration. It constitutes a special occurrence, a divine gift. The above passage cannot be taken to imply that Tillich is an idealist. Such a dramatic moment of Spirit-filled ecstasy briefly unites the creature with his creator, but in his permanent state the creature is separate from his creator. The pneumatological event constitutes a special,

and rare, dispensation. Tillich's basic doctrine of divine-human contact remains rooted in the idea of correlation.

To understand Tillich's doctrine of correlation fully, it is necessary to examine the philosophical roots of his "theology of experience and inwardness". This examination shows why Tillich insists on a re-emphasis on the doctrine of God's immanence, while at the same time formulating that doctrine in terms of correlation rather than identity.

In Theology of Culture Tillich sets out the two main types of religious philosophy which have flourished in the western world. This examination returns us to familiar ground:

One can distinguish two ways of approaching God: the way of overcoming estrangement and the way of meeting a stranger. In the first way man discovers himself when he discovers God; he discovers something that is identical with himself although it transcends him infinitely, something from which he is estranged, but from which he never has been and never can be separated. In the second way man meets a stranger when he meets God. The meeting is accidental. Essentially they do not belong to each other. They may become friends on a tentative and conjectural basis. But there is no certainty about the stranger man has met. He may disappear, and only probable statements can be made about his nature.  
[Tillich, TC, p 10, 1969]

This latter view, the cosmological approach, is the view most responsible for religious alienation, according to Tillich. Our experience of life tells us that not all persons are likeable or trustworthy. Even those who seem friendly may be badly disposed towards us. If God is a person, a stranger met, he remains separate from us and is capable of rejecting us utterly or withdrawing from us forever - "disappearing". The fear of losing the friendship and respect of this stranger weighs heavily upon the religious consciousness.

This is the false God, an alien, the God who must die. An all-powerful other person, whom one must continually obey and try to please, inevitably becomes a tyrant: "For God as a Subject makes me into an object which is nothing more than an object. He deprives me of my subjectivity because he is all-powerful and all knowing... God appears as the invincible tyrant, the being in contrast with whom all other things are without freedom and subjectivity." [Tillich, CTB, p 179, 1979] Man may fear and attempt to placate such a tyrant but ultimately will revolt, so God "becomes the model of everything against which Existentialism revolted. This is the God Nietzsche said had to be killed because nobody can tolerate being made into a mere object of absolute knowledge and absolute control." [Tillich, CTB, p 179, 1979] The revolt against this misrepresentation of divinity is quite justified, Tillich claims, and more than that, it is necessary. Man cannot live in bondage to his own false conception of God, a conception which enslaves and degrades him. This individual God, this stranger, "is the deepest root of atheism. It is an atheism which is justified as the reaction against the theological theism and its disturbing implication. It is also the deepest root of Existentialist despair and the widespread anxiety of meaninglessness in our period". [Tillich, CTB, p 179, 1979] So the false God, the God of transcendence - the completely "other" - is rejected in favour of the God who appears through the insight of the ontological method. Yet even in this other, and less popular conception, transcendence has an important role. The ontological approach does not go over to the other extreme (as one might expect) of bringing God right into the very objects of creation through the doctrine of identity. The notion of correlation preserves the importance of transcendence.

This can be seen in the long passage quoted above. Man's "estrangement" is real, i.e. he does not possess the actual substance of the divine, for the divine "transcends him infinitely". Yet there is "something that is identical with himself" in the divine; there is a point of identity, a point of correlation (i.e. a shared category), but no identity of substance. The shared category is spirit, but the divine Spirit is separate from human spirit. The human spirit, though, as part of unified creation, is dependent on the divine Spirit both ontologically and epistemologically. The created world has an intuitive apprehension of its divine ground.<sup>13</sup> Thus Bonaventura: "God is most truly present to the very soul and immediately knowable." [In Tillich, TC, p 13, 1969]

Such implicit knowledge is the only true knowledge of God, according to Tillich. The cosmological method lays the whole question of God open to doubt because "the Thomistic method of knowledge through sense perception and abstraction may be useful for scientific purposes, but it never can reach the Absolute." [Tillich TC, p 13, 1969] Religious experience is a valid authenticator; deductive reasoning never could be: "It (immediate religious knowledge) is distinguished from humana ratiocinatio, human reasoning, as well as from scripturarum auctoritas, the authority of the Holy

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<sup>13</sup> This must be true of nature, too, to make sense of Paul's statement in Romans 8:22. The "animus" in nature can be said to be intuitively responsive to its divine origin. Obviously it has no purposeful consciousness.



Scripture. It is certitudo ex se ipsis, certainty out of the things themselves, without a medium."<sup>14</sup> [ibid. p 14]

We are able to perceive the working of Being-itself immediately and certainly because the universe is a structured, closed system. Tillich claims that our minds are naturally related to Being (through its logos structure); we have the categories to recognise the transcendentalia (bonum ipsum the good-itself; verum ipsum, the true-itself - both manifestations of the universal reality, esse ipsum, being-itself as the ground and abyss of everything that is). [Tillich, TC, p 15, 1969; ST I, p 229, 1955] Finite spirit, again, is directed towards its ontological and epistemological ground.

A possible disadvantage of this ontological approach is that rationality gives way to mysticism:

The Augustinian tradition can rightly be called mystical, if mysticism is defined as the experience of the identity of subject and object in relation to Being itself. In terms of our ideas of stranger and estrangement Meister Eckhart says: 'There is between God and the soul neither strangeness nor remoteness, therefore the soul is not only equal with God but it is... the same that He is.' This is, of course, a paradoxical statement, as Eckhart and all mystics knew; for in order to state the identity, and element of non-identity must be presupposed. [Tillich, TC, p 15, 1969]

Tillich here admires the mystical monism implicit within Eckhart's system, but cannot embrace it unconditionally. He knows that the

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<sup>14</sup> That is, without an external, man-made medium. The passage on pp 35-37 shows that Tillich considers "Spirit" to be a medium of correlation. It is an intrinsic medium though, not one of external origin.

subject-object separation must be overcome if God is not to be "the stranger", "the wholly other", but his appreciation of the importance of transcendence leads him to talk of "an element of non-identity" between God and man. This is a weak statement of something which Tillich insists on more strongly elsewhere. At times Tillich makes strong statements insisting on God's transcendence of the finite realms. "Being-itself" infinitely transcends every finite being. There is no proportion or gradation between the finite and the infinite. There is an absolute break, an infinite 'jump'." [Tillich, ST I p 263, 1955] This means that there is no substantial identity between God and man; closeness, as has been said, is on the basis of correlation.

Tillich stresses this separation between God and man when he explicitly denies the idealist idea that God is universal essence: "If God is understood as universal essence, as the form of all forms, he is identified with the unity and totality of finite potentialities, but he has ceased to be the power of the ground in all of them, and therefore he has ceased to transcend them. He has poured all his creative power into a system of forms, and he is bound to these forms." [Tillich, ST I, p 262, 1955] This is a strong rejection of the idealist position, for it makes it plain that any theory which posits God as inhabiting finite forms is one which severely limits him, making him partially subject to finite categories. No part of being-itself (i.e. the part subsumed within natural objects) can be of a lesser nature than any other part. Being-itself must be held to be indivisible (as traditional theology teaches). The qualitative difference between the divine and human spirit must be maintained. [Meyer, pp 38-39, 1977]

This idea is reinforced by Tillich when he discusses the ontological polarities of existence. Under the conditions of finitude, equal importance must be given to the polar elements of individualisation and participation. [Tillich, ST I, pp 220-221, 1955] This principle applies when participation is understood to be participation in the social community and when it is understood to be participation in being-itself. The importance of individualisation must be asserted for man "ceases to be if one of the poles is lost, for the loss of either pole means the loss of both". [Tillich, ST I, p 221, 1955] Man's freedom is preserved through the pole of individualisation. Thus, estrangement from God is a real possibility since there is a real ontological split between man and God.

At this stage it becomes clear that Rubenstein's placing of Tillich amongst idealistic, pantheistic thinkers represents an underestimation of Tillich's belief in God's transcendence. Rubenstein, in Morality and Eros (pp 188-192) contrasts the cosmological view of God with the idealistic one, but does not there extend his discussion to embrace the ontological approach to God (which approach stops short of idealism). In Power Struggle, Rubenstein briefly stops to acknowledge the importance of the pole of individualisation in Tillich's thinking [Rubenstein, PS, p 162, 1974] but then immediately goes on to describe Tillich's concept of Being-itself in terms of mystical Mediterranean earth paganism [p 162-163]. This line of analysis prompts the judgement that "Tillich's conception of God is... more indebted to the religious conceptions of German mysticism than to the biblical tradition". [p 162] This judgement, perhaps, does not sufficiently take into account Tillich's emphasis on God's transcendence and his preservation of all the traditional symbols of God in his semiotic theory.

In summary, then, Tillich rejects the idealistic model for one which emphasises a correlation between Spirit and spirit. In The Shaking of the Foundations Tillich talks of "a Spirit distinguished from our spirit, yet able to make itself understood to our spirit, beyond us and yet in us". [Tillich, SF, p 135, 1948] In this sermon Tillich does not directly equate Spirit with being-itself, nor indeed does he explicitly do so elsewhere. Tillich claims that only one non-symbolic statement can be made about God, namely that God is being-itself. [Tillich, ST I, p 265, 1955] Yet the term "Spirit" seems a particularly appropriate one by which to translate being-itself, for it successfully encompasses the notions of God's incorporeality and indivisibility. It is an important biblical term (e.g. John 4:24; 2 Cor 3:17) and can be used to make sense of the all-encompassing nature of being-itself, as described by Tillich.

Tillich describes Spirit as "the aspect of God ecstatically present in the human spirit and implicitly in everything which constitutes the dimension of the spirit". [Tillich, ST III, p 301, 1964] This writer believes that the term can be put to greater use. For God is immaterial and indivisible and cannot be held to operate in any other than a spiritual way. Tillich feels that the spiritual presence of God appears only in a "definite aspect" [ibid.] holding that it does not find expression in the symbols of creation and salvation [ibid]. But the Bible has passages which support the notion of creation entailing the work of the Spirit (Gen 1:2) and the infusion of spirit (Gen 2:7), while salvation is characterised by receptivity to God's healing spirit (Acts 2:38). Perhaps, for the sake of academic subtlety, there are instances when the term

"Spirit" should not be used to express being-itself; as a means of translating being-itself, though, the term is very useful, especially when one has to counter theories which claim that "being-itself" is a meaningless expression. This is, perhaps, the usefulness of idealism with respect to Tillich: it provides a fairly good translation for "being-itself". Rubenstein roughly translates being-itself as Geist [Rubenstein, ME, p 190, 1979] and with respect to this, his contribution is a useful one. "Spirit" is a powerful term. It encompasses both the Logos and the Abyss of reality [Tillich, ST I, p 173, 1955]. The term will receive greater attention in the next chapter; in this one it will be used as a translation of being-itself, for the reason that some translation is necessary.

## 2.8. Tillich and pantheism

Owen identifies a hybridisation of thought in Tillich which makes him impossible to label: "One can quote passages from his writings to support theism, pantheism, panentheism." [Owen, p 132, 1971] This is not obviously true with respect to pantheism, although, as has been said, Tillich insists on a pantheistic element in every adequate doctrine of God to counter "the half-deistic theism of much Protestant theology". [in O'Meara, p 308, 1964] The "panentheist" classification is justifiable, as will be shown below.

When Tillich defines pantheism, he shows that it is far closer to Hegelian idealism than it is to primitive animism:

Pantheism does not mean, never has meant, and never should mean that everything that is is God. If God is identified with nature (deus sive nature), it is not the totality of natural objects which is called God but rather the creative power and unity of nature, the

absolute substance which is present in everything. And if God is identified with the absolute of idealistic monism, it is the essential structure of being, the essence of all essences, which is called God. Pantheism is the doctrine that God is the substance or essence of all things, not the meaningless assertion that God is that totality of things. [Tillich, ST I, p 258, 1955]

Here Tillich shows the inter-relatedness of pantheism and idealism. From observations made in the preceding section, it is clear why Tillich cannot be labelled a pantheist. The scholars who criticise Tillich for being a pantheist misrepresent his position, which leads to a false imputation. Thus McLean writes: "According to Tillich, this pantheism, which considers God to be the substance or essence of all things, is necessary for Christianity. It is the very foundation of that divine presence which becomes actual and manifest in the circumstances of revelation." [In O'Meara, p 79, 1964] We have seen that Tillich rejects the notion of a universal substance; his doctrine is one of correlation, not identity. So he replies to McLean:

I must sharply reject the assertion that I call God "the essence of all things". In many places I emphasise that this dissolves God into the essence of the world and removes his qualitative transcendence. It is an essentialistic (formerly called idealistic) form of naturalism and it would deny freedom and individuality both to God and to creatures. [Tillich in O'Meara, p 308, 1964]

So pantheism and idealism posit a universal substance common to all reality. Tillich rejects this type of philosophy on the grounds that it denies the freedom (for God and man) given expression to in the ontological pole of individualisation. Tillich is not a pantheist because he insists on a qualitative difference between God and the world.

G.F. Thomas relates Tillich's God-concept to the doctrine of panentheism: "...like Hegel,<sup>15</sup> he (Tillich) seeks to synthesise the pantheistic element of immanence with the theistic element of transcendence in a way that seems to point to Panentheism rather than Pantheism." [Thomas, p 411, 1965] This is the meaning of panentheism, that God is present within the world, but, because Holy (the reason for his qualitative difference), he cannot be identified with it. Tillich's doctrine of God as being-itself may be described as panentheistic for "panentheism is itself really a variety of theism, one which takes care to stress God's immanence equally with his transcendence." [Macquarrie, PCT, p 120, 1977] Tillich does the concept of God's transcendence just a by insisting on the qualitative difference between God and man. He also shows his respect for the concept through his preservation of the transcendent symbols for God, made use of by traditional authority. In one branch of his doctrine of God, to be considered now, Tillich 'ut-transcends' the cosmological transcendents.

#### 2.9. God and personhood

Thus far the examination of Tillich's theology has focused on issues which have importance primarily for philosophical theologians. The issue of God's personhood is one issue in which the worshipping community has a more direct interest. The category of personality has always been ascribed to the theistic God. At first, personality was attributed to God in a crudely anthropomorphic way. Nowadays

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas makes a mistake here for, as has been shown, Hegel's essentialism or idealism is expressed in decidedly pantheistic terms.



the reciprocity of the personal encounter between God and man is stated in more sophisticated terms; due regard is given to God's infinite transcendence of man. [See Buber's I and Thou]

The correlation of personhood between God and man is stressed by Ott: "The primary characteristic of personhood is reciprocity... and if faith is a personal act, if reciprocity is the essence of personhood, then this reciprocity must also be of the essence of the relationship between God and man." [Ott, p 51, 1975] So the divine-human encounter must be understood in terms of personality. Does this then not imply that two persons are involved? If man is a person, and he enters into a two-way personal relationship with God, then can we not safely say that God is a person too? Tillich says no.

Tillich does not deny the existence (nor, indeed, the necessity) of personal communication within the religious experience. Individuality implies personhood, but the individual fully realises his personality only when in a state of "communion" with others, and he realises it most fully when in a state of communion with God, the ground of all personality. [Tillich, ST I, p 271, 1955] But, for Tillich, God could never be merely a person. Classical theology used the term persona in connection with the trinitarian 'postases, but not for God himself. [Ibid]

God cannot be a person, argues Tillich, for the same reason that he cannot be a being: God would then be bound to the categories of finitude. Unlike man, God is not subject to the polar split between the ontological elements, which constitute the structure of essential being. Tillich distinguishes Self and World as the

basic ontological structure, which has the following polar ontological elements: individualisation and participation; dynamics and form; freedom and destiny. Now "selfhood, individuality, dynamics and freedom all include manifoldness, definiteness, differentiation, and limitation. To be something is not to be something else. To be here and now in the process of becoming is not to be there and then. All categories of thought and reality express this situation. To be something is to be finite".

[Tillich, ST I, p 211, 1955]

So God cannot be classified as an individual without our denying his role as participant. God cannot be less of a participant than an individual. Both individualisation and participation are intrinsic to the divine life so that "God is equally 'near' to each of them while transcending them both". [Tillich, ST I, p 271, 1955] As the divine ground of all being, God - as immanent and transcendent to creation - is at once individual and participant. There is no ontological cleft in his nature. He cannot be a person, unless at the expense of his own participation in his creation. So, just as God is not a being, so he is not a person.

So again Tillich seeks to protect the idea of God's infinity by disallowing a description of God which would allow him to be subsumed within a category of finitude. But God is related to personhood in that "he carries within himself the ontological power of personality". [Tillich, ST I, p 271, 1955] By this Tillich presumably means that God is the creative source of individuation and personhood; that the autonomy of separate personalities is a result of divine action. But if God is the source of personhood, but is not a person, how are we to express his 'person-likeness'?

Tillich replies, "He (God) is not a person, but he is not less than personal". [Tillich, ST I p 271. 1955]

This statement represents an attempt to emphasise God's transcendence, his "wholly otherness".<sup>16</sup> A person is an individual and hence finite. God is not a person but his nature could not be of a lesser order than that of man; he cannot, therefore, be sub-personal (because a subpersonal being lacks self-reflective consciousness). At the same time, man is able to experience a reciprocal relationship with God, so God is not wholly suprapersonal. Thus Tillich's solution lies in the phrase "not less than personal"; God is able to function at the level of personality, but infinitely transcends the category of personhood.

The reason that God was ever conceived as a person, according to Tillich, was that, as a person, God could be negotiated with, bribed or begged for favours. A person has predispositions, likes and dislikes, and can be dealt with on the basis of appeal to certain behavioural inclinations. When such an attitude arises, religion becomes magic. [Tillich, ST I, p 236, 1955] Such a primitive understanding of the divine-human relationship leads to a loss of prestige for the God-concept. God must be understood to be above manipulative persuasion. Tillich has always upheld man's right of protest against such a view of God: "Ordinary theism has made God a heavenly, completely perfect person who resides above the world and mankind. The protest of atheism against such a highest person is correct. There is no evidence for his existence, nor is he a

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<sup>16</sup> To use the language of Rudolf Otto.

matter of ultimate concern." [Tillich, ST I, p 271, 1955] It is the God of the cosmological approach that is again being denied here. That God, the person, the stranger, is held to be unacceptably distant from the world. The God of the cosmological approach is the God of accentuated transcendence. Yet, paradoxically, Tillich (the "immanentist") looks for a transcendence in the divine not provided for in the cosmological approach. For the personal category itself must be transcended.

H. Ott, for whom personhood is the key symbol for God, agrees with Tillich that God could not be less than personal and that God could not be simply a person among others. [Ott, p 56, 1975] He attempts to reassert the cosmological view with renewed vigour through his use of the term "infinite Person" to describe God [ibid.] This is Ott's way of seeking to preserve God's transcendence while preserving the idea that God is a person. But this "infinite Person" is still the "completely perfect person" that Tillich will not accept. In the Tillichian framework the description "infinite personality" is self-contradictory, for personality corresponds to the ontological pole of individuality and God is then seen as finite (being subject to categories of finitude). For Tillich, the personal category automatically implies limitedness. Ott does not answer Tillich adequately on this point and because of this his position appears less sophisticated and less developed.<sup>17</sup> The tenability of Tillich's doctrine of God with respect to personality, will be tested directly. At this stage it must be emphasised

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<sup>17</sup> Ott's discussion of Tillich's position (pp 53-57) makes no mention of Tillich's analysis of the ontological elements of existence. He does not fully seem to take the point that, for Tillich, the very notion of personhood implies finitude.

that, in this sphere particularly, Tillich does justice to the notion of God's transcendence. This chapter begins with Tillich's rejection of anthropomorphism. We have seen how this aspect of Tillich's thought leads to the denial that God is a person at all. Tillich's stand in this connection reveals that he could not be considered an idealist, since there is a side to God which quite transcends everything of which man knows. It can scarcely be denied that his theology has a strong emphasis on the transcendence of God.

#### 2.10. Critique of Tillich's doctrine of God

Tillich's doctrine of God has served to lead us away from a crudely anthropomorphic view of God. It has gone further, though, showing how anthropomorphic conceptions are naturally related to the cosmological approach to theism. As has been shown, this approach conceives of God as a particular being, a person located in space, whose existence can be logically deduced. Such an approach is lined to the anthropomorphic view because the attributes of invisibility and incorporeality are played down. When one talks of a being, one presupposes that the thing being talked about has some physical form. Theologians of the cosmological school may well deny that one need do this, but the way that God is talked about (as a being, a person) suggests a tacit predilection for a physical conception of God. This conception of a physically constituted entity gives rise to the naturalistic philosophy which is crucial to the cosmological approach. God is derived via "proofs" which take their starting point from the world of nature and proceed to posit the necessity of God's existence on the basis of a need to find a cause for the perceived effects in the world. Logical analysis works with entities and substances, discernable and describable. To posit God

as the "end point" of a chain of finite causes, is to include him within the category of finite objects.

As we have seen, Tillich rejects the very notion of the "existence" of God since, for Tillich, finitude implies a split between a being's existence and its essence: "The question of the existence of God can be neither asked nor answered. If asked, it is a question about that which by its very nature is above existence, and therefore the answer - whether negative or affirmative - implicitly denies the nature of God." [Tillich, ST I, p 261, 1955] In this way Tillich eschews the whole inductive exercise with respect to proving the existence of God. Being-itself, since it underlies everything in the universe, cannot be located or demonstrated. It eludes any attempts to induce it; Tillich's stress on God's immanence dissuades us from searching for God as a transcendent object. Being, as it were, hidden within his creation as its creative source and ground, God can never be an object of rational demonstration.

This aspect of Tillich's theology has a particular appeal for it does justice to the notion of God's infinite nature. Tillich makes it clear that God is not the greatest object within a known category, but cannot fit any known category at all. The wholly otherness of God, his transcendent aspect, is given full expression within Tillich's theology.

Very important, too, is Tillich's insistence on locating religious knowledge within a dimension in which reason is present as one el-

ement amongst other affective cognitive elements.<sup>18</sup> Tillich's formulation of religious faith is a convincing one which follows directly from his ontological theology, his understanding of how being-itself is present to the consciousness of individual being. The whole purpose of the ontological approach is to establish the nearness of man and God; man's spirit experiences a correlation with divine Spirit which enables man to have an intuitive awareness of and partial understanding of being-itself. This is the genius of Tillich's system, that by denying that God is a being, God's transcendence and immanence is enhanced. For, not being an entity, God transcends familiar categories; not being located anywhere precisely, though, God may be, as it were, "brought down to earth", identified more closely with his own creation. So he cannot be induced (not possessing a particular body or space) but he can be experienced because he becomes closely identified with that which he has created and which he sustains. And so our knowledge of God is derived from all facets of existence: "If God is the creative ground of everything that has being, everything insofar as it is must express something knowable about God." [Tillich in O'Meara, p 23, 1964]

To apprehend being-itself, all facets of man's personality come into play. In Dynamics of Faith, Tillich explains how faith operates. The essential point made is that man's response to the infinite involves his total person, which means that reason plays a

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<sup>18</sup> An outline of Tillich's doctrine of epistemic faith appears below.



part along with nonrational<sup>15</sup> elements such as feelings, intuitions, will. Tillich goes even further, insisting that faith (involving the whole of man's being) involves both conscious and unconscious elements of personality, although the non-conscious and unconscious elements will always be subservient to the conscious elements since faith is essentially a conscious act. [Tillich, DF, p 5, 1957]

So the starting point for faith is human experience, the apprehension of being-itself through the total response of personality towards that which is perceived as being a fitting locus for one's ultimate concern. From within his existential situation, man perceives a correlation between his needs and that which being-itself appears to convey. The threat of non-being implicit within extreme forms of anxiety is met by an experience of the power of being-itself, which may be perceived in everything that is. This "power of being" provides the "courage to be". [Tillich, CTB, p 173-176, 1979]

The location of religious knowledge within the experiential sphere is one of the strong points of Tillich's theology. The cosmologists see it as a weakness, since it cannot guarantee logical certitude. The cosmologists claims to establish logical certitude with respect to belief. Arguing against Bertrand Russell, Copleston presents a version of Leibniz's argument from "Contingency" in an attempt to

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<sup>15</sup> Stewart argues that the term "nonrational" is far removed from the term "irrational": something irrational runs counter to reason, while something nonrational is something outside the bounds of logical explanation e.g. experiences of love; aesthetics; intuitions. [Stewart, p 12, 1980]

demonstrate rationally the necessity of the existence of God.

[Russell, p 134, 1967] Of course, if such an argument were generally accepted, the cosmologists could claim to have a superior base for the establishment of religious knowledge. However, such causal arguments have met with widespread scholastic criticism. This is not the place for a detailed discussion on the logical "proofs" for the existence of God. It must be noted, though, that the preponderant view is that they carry little weight or, at least, they do not readily compel acceptance. Both Hick and Macquarrie, whose views may be held to be indicative of informed scholastic opinion, reject the "proofs" for God's existence as logically insufficient.<sup>20</sup> [Hick, PR, p 30, 1973; Macquarrie, PCT, p 34, 1977]

Tillich agrees with this assessment. He writes: "There can be little doubt that the arguments are a failure in so far as they claim to be arguments." [Tillich, ST I, p 227, 1955] But he goes further, arguing that the inductive method is inappropriate when applied to God, for such a method searches for a thing, an object. It is precisely because of its inductive methodology that the cosmological argument would remain ineffective, even if the existence of a "supreme being" could be established. For we would have no reason to confidently ascribe the traditional theistic attributes to such a being. Hick makes this point with reference to the argument from Design (also an argument from contingency). He says that "even if we could validly infer a divine Designer of the world,

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<sup>20</sup> This does not imply that the arguments have no value. Tillich believes that they give expression to the question of God i.e. they help to elaborate the reasons why man claims to have an implicit awareness of God. Natural theology is valuable insofar as the "proofs" cast light on such an awareness. [Tillich, ST I, p 228, 1955]

we would still not be entitled to postulate the infinitely wise, good, and powerful God of Christian tradition. From a given effect we can only infer a cause sufficient to produce that effect; and therefore, from a finite world we can never infer an infinite creator". [Hick, PR, p 26, 1973] So the cosmological approach could, at best, establish the existence of "someone there" but the "someone" remains a stranger. A rational demonstration could, hypothetically, demonstrate that God exists, but could not tell us about his nature.

In comparison with this approach, Tillich's ontological approach is strongly attractive. As opposed to the cosmological approach, it asserts that there is an intrinsic link between God's existence and his essence. Therefore, in becoming aware of the presence of God, one becomes aware of his nature too. This is the highest point of all Tillichian theology; the close association between God and the world provides theology with a basis for making assertions about God. God is not the stranger, but is present here and now. He is knowable through the individual's relatedness to that which brought him into being. Man's response is not merely "intuitive" or "experiential"; a hypostasis of all functions of the personality is insisted upon: "Awareness of the Unconditional is itself unconditional, and therefore beyond the division of the psychological functions." [Tillich, TC, p 23, 1969]

Thus Tillich draws a distinction between "ecstatic reason" (reason in hypostatic union with non-cognitive elements of the self) and "technical reason" (reason in the sense of logical deduction). [ST I, p 60, 1955] Faith never excludes reason, but faith based on

logical argument will be sterile and unproductive. Kaufman sums up Tillich's position in the following way:

Following his great predecessor Schleiermacher, who directly and openly made Gefühl the ground of all consciousness and experience, Tillich sees our ordinary thinking about things in the world, as well as our scientific knowledge, to be a highly restricted product of our limited 'technical reason' and not to be trusted as an adequate basis for overall orientation in life. Such reason is abstracted from the full 'ontological reason' which includes feeling as well as structure and which is our fundamental link with reality. [Kaufman, p 216, 1972]

Tillich's insistence on such a total and centred response, the response of "ecstatic" or "ontological" reason is fitting if one is to do justice to the phenomenon of religion. Religion, certainly, involves the commitment of the whole man, man as philosopher but also man as sentient being. So the cognition of the divine involves a special kind of perception. It has a logical side, for God as Logos has created structures which are accessible to the human mind. It has an intuitive side, for man senses or becomes aware of a presence which is powerful and demanding. [Tillich, TC, p 23, 1969] Central to the whole ontological method stands the notion of God as being-itself. For, as immanent within creation, God may be perceived in an intuitive, experiential way. If he were a distant being out in space, this would be impossible. The notion of God as being-itself is the key concept in Tillich's existential theology. This theology stands as a necessary corrective to the supranaturalism of the cosmological approach. It brings God closer to his creation than in the other approach, although God's infinite transcendence of creation is always stressed. [Tillich, ST II, p 8, 1957] Particularly important is Tillich's location of religious knowledge within a plausible realm, a realm which also caters for every fact of man's personality. For, to seek religious certitude

by means of philosophical argument, is implausible at present. And, if Tillich is right, the very attempt to do so may be invalid. The idea that God is being-itself goes hand in hand with the theology of experience. And such a theology does do justice to the religious dynamic. Further, experiential theology has a firm scriptural base. No rational argument for the existence of God appears in the Bible. Biblical theism takes its point from the collective experience of Israel and the "numinous" experiences of various individuals. [Hick, AEG, p 102, 1970] Tillich's strong emphasis on religious experience places him firmly within the Biblical tradition.

From the above, something of the value of Tillich's God-concept can be seen. Yet, this writer is not convinced that the concept of God as being-itself will pave the way towards a new theology. There are a number of problems with the concept of being-itself. To render it intelligible, one has to find a meaningful term of reference for it while at the same time upholding the idea that God is not a concrete entity. As has been argued, the term "Spirit" can be utilised, for it conveys the idea of divine presence in a spatially unrestricted sense. The term is certainly useful, but one has to develop it to show how God is the "ground of all being", in which all beings "participate" and which constitutes the "dimension of depth" in reality. If, however, justice is to be done to the idea of participation, then the idealist model is the one which would accomplish the task. For, in saying that God is being-itself, one wants to say more than that God is the creator; one wants to move beyond the traditional model. One even wants to go further than asserting that the mark of God is upon creation, that man is oriented towards God by virtue of an apprehension of

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the divine. The traditional model, despite its depiction of God as a being, still contains the notion of man's awareness of the divine. The idealist model understands this awareness as being implicit, since it conceives of Spirit inhabiting matter. The idealist has a strong basis for a theology of inwardness, of experience - the indwelling of the universal Spirit within finite objects and creatures. If a theology of inwardness is desirable, idealism can successfully express it.

The idealist model is the easiest one to defend against nominalist critics like Paul Edwards, who argues that being-itself has no "referent", by which he means that there is no object of reference in the universe to which we can attach the appellative "God". [See Novak, p 56, 1967] The idealist answer is that the energising power of the universe is a force which may be called "Spirit"; it is everywhere and infuses each "being" or thing on earth. It is able to penetrate matter, to "move through it" as it were, but is not in itself material, and this non-materiality constitutes its transcendent aspect. Because the word "being" can be translated as "existence", being-itself comes to mean the very stuff of life itself. In other words, being-itself can be used predicatively since the words "spirit" and "life" can be used interchangeably within the idealist model; that which contains "spirit" has existence, or "being". Such an understanding makes sense of that passage (referred to earlier) in Love, Power and Justice, in which Tillich (in somewhat Spinozan fashion) speaks of being-itself as being a unifying texture, something "which is effective in everything that is". [Tillich, LPJ, p 20, 1969] Here being-itself is used predicatively as a quality which a thing possesses. Within the context of idealism, such a doctrine makes perfect sense. This

writer feels that a case could be made for the doctrine of being-itself if Tillich allowed the mystical strand of his thought to culminate in an idealist philosophy.

But idealism is not a Christian philosophy<sup>21</sup> and Tillich wants to remain within the Christian tradition, the theological circle.

[Tillich, ST I, pp 11f, 1955] Powerful statements of God's transcendence in scripture pre-empt an idealistic theology.

Deutero-Isaiah imputes the following assertion to Yahweh:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways. This is the very word of the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9; NEB).

This extract uses the kind of spatially primitive language referred to by Robinson and Tillich, but if one strips that away, what remains is a strong statement in support of divine transcendence.

Scripture abounds with verses that stress the difference in nature between God and man (for example Matt 7:9-11; Isa 64:5-6).

Tillich's doctrine of God has a strong transcendent aspect in that it opposes the view that God can easily be categorised (as the Supreme Being) and easily described (via the system of analogical predication). According to Tillich, God is not a finite being and his attributes must be described symbolically. So, in Tillich's theology, there is a role for the mysterious and ineffable. Braaten

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<sup>21</sup> Because of idealist strains in Tillich's thought, Owen is reluctant to label Tillich's theology "Christian" at all. He relates Tillich's views to those of Hindu thinker Radhakrishnan. [Owen, p 133, 1971] Owen, however, does not sufficiently take into account the strong emphasis on God's transcendence in Tillich's thought. A more appropriate criticism would be to say that Tillich, unsuccessfully, combines traditional Christianity and idealism.



sees Tillich's background in German mysticism as being evident when Tillich "protests the reduction of the picture of God in late nineteenth-century Protestantism to the simple image of a loving father". [Braaten, p XXIX, 1972] Tillich insists that the holiness of God contains an "abysmal" element - an element which defies description and comprehension. So Braaten writes: "Tillich was always grateful to Rudolf Otto's book, The Idea of the Holy, for making him more deeply aware of the abysmal mystery of God, the mysterium tremendum et fascinans." [Braaten, p XXIX, 1972] That this is so can be seen when Tillich examines the subject of holiness. For Tillich, the experience of God necessarily includes a sense of God's inscrutability. With reference to Isaiah 6 Tillich writes: "God can reveal himself only by remaining veiled. But even the veiled revelation makes Isaiah feel that he is perishing. The facing of God, even if it be a mere approaching to his sphere, even if God himself remain hidden, means the annihilation of man." [Tillich, SF, p 89, 1948]

This experience of "annihilation", which corresponds to Otto's "mysterium tremendum", refers to the "subjective responses of dread, insignificance, and impotence" [Stewart, p 22, 1980] which are elicited in the face of the "wholly otherness" of the divine. Now this "wholly otherness" is incompatible with the doctrine of identity. What is stressed in the idea of the transcendence of God is this: that which constitutes the essence of the divine cannot be that which constitutes the essence of humanity. So then, by

virtue of the emphasis of God's transcendence in his thought, Tillich cannot be an idealist.<sup>22</sup>

The direction of this discourse, then, leads to the question of whether the concept of being-itself can be upheld, given that Tillich places fairly equal emphasis on God's transcendence and his immanence. This writer is of the opinion that Tillich's ontological approach to theology does not satisfactorily accommodate the idea of being-itself. For the idea of correlation cannot quite capture the notion of man's "participation" in the divine, nor does it do justice to the idea that God is the "ground" or "depth" of all life. The doctrine of identity, rather than correlation, best gives expression to these terms.

With regard to the notion of "participation", Tillich's doctrine of God as being-itself can be shown to be partially efficacious. Rowe's complaint against Tillich, with respect to participation, is that Tillich "fails to explain the many different uses which the term has in his system". [Rowe, p 118, 1968] It is true that Tillich gives the term a wide application. Even if he doesn't explain the different uses of the term to the degree which one would like, he does list the primary functions of participation. [Tillich, ST I, p 196, 1955] Two functions listed merit special attention. One function is that "the knower participates in the known" and the other is the "the existent participates in the essences which make it what it is, under the condition of existence". The first refers to an epistemological participation and the second

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<sup>22</sup> And, as has been shown, he does not claim to be.

an ontological participation. But when Tillich refers to man's universal participation, it is man's participation in the Logos structure of reality which is expressed: "Man participates in the universe through the rational structure of mind and reality. Considered environmentally, he participates in a very small section of reality... Considered cosmically, he participates in the universe because the universal structure, forms and laws are open to him." [Tillich, ST I, p 195, 1955] From the point of view of the concept of correlation, this is the logical line to take: participation in the universal, and by extension the divine, is primarily effected by virtue of a sharing of what the divine knows rather than by a sharing of divine essence.<sup>23</sup> This type of participation, though, is participation in what one may term

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<sup>23</sup> Here, again, we see a difference between Tillichian theology and idealism. On pages 23-24 it was stated that idealism unites being and meaning in the closest sense; the power of being and the power of mind are both incorporated in the concept of spirit. Because Tillich stresses correlation, not identity, he denies universal essence. He knows he is on safer ground when stressing a union of cognition, for no notion of "substantial identity" need be involved. However, this union of cognition must not be taken to mean that man can "know" reality in the intimate sense that idealism suggests. If God infinitely transcends man, then the meeting point of cognition will be at a very restricted level. The basic meeting point is an awareness of structures. Mysticism, which implies an ecstatic mode of cognition, may lead to more intimate knowledge of the supernatural realm. Yet western mysticism stops short of idealism, for its state of elevated consciousness is not permanent. Idealism, on the other hand, insists on the permanent presence of the divine category of spirit. If one understands "participation" as implying no more than a knowledge of structures, then Rowe's insistence on a shared universal is unnecessary (see page 23). Correlation takes place through man's appreciation of structures in nature (and here natural theology has value, according to Tillich). However, Rowe's statements implying idealism can be understood because of the sometimes loose nature of Tillich's language. "Participation is too strong to translate a correlation of cognition. Also, Tillich's statement that "knowledge... reunites elements which essentially belong together" permits idealist speculation, whereas all Tillich should be pointing out is the creature's awareness of his dependence on the creator.

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"consciousness-itself" or "mind-itself" rather than "being-itself". As the "power of being", being-itself should be more than that which informs human consciousness. And if being-itself is the ground of all being [Tillich, ST II, p 8, 1957] then it is the ground of all natural objects, objects which lack consciousness. But nature, too, according to Tillich, has an implicit awareness of its creative ground, which it proclaims through its various manifestations: "The psalmist has heard it, he knows what the stars are sounding: the glory of creation and its Divine Ground." [Tillich, SF, p 78, 1948] How is one to explain this sense of communion between creation and creator, unless by virtue of an idealist doctrine of identity?<sup>24</sup> One could, of course, say that nature is part of the Logos structure of reality (nature exhibits structures) but one would still have to explain in what sense nature is "aware" of its own "rationality".

Tillich's answer, which opens a whole new area of debate, is that the statement of nature's sentience is "half-poetic, half-philosophic". [Tillich, SF, p 82, 1948] Even accepting that this expression comes from a sermon (sermons being more rhetorical than discourses), one has to remark that the expression is hardly helpful. Such statements reinforce the idea that Tillich is a mystical thinker whose philosophy is tinged by poetics throughout. Tillich insists that "God is being-itself" is a literal statement,

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<sup>24</sup> If one adopted this doctrine, though, one would have to account for nature's sense of its own "fallenness". [SF, p 82] This could possibly be done through the idea of the travail of spirit under the restrictions of material existence.

but if we were permitted to think of it as at least partly poetical,<sup>25</sup> we would perhaps find it easier to come to terms with. Certainly a poetical appreciation seems necessary in interpreting the phrase "ground of all being" by which Tillich seeks to translate "being-itself".

The term "ground" permits an ambiguity in Tillich's philosophy. The word itself can mean "motive" or "valid reason" but it can also mean "substratum" or "underlying part". Traditional theology sees the first definition as acceptable since it implies that God is the creator of the universe. Idealists also permit the second definition, which implies that God is the very stuff of existence or universal essence. Tillich allows the ambiguity to exist; this enables him to claim to be a Christian theologian while retaining a strong idealist emphasis. This ambiguity leads Thomas to talk of Tillich's theology as comprising an "unstable compromise between Pantheism and Theism". [Thomas, p 418, 1965] Thomas claims that Tillich "seeks to synthesise pantheism and theism by affirming that God contains the many finite things within himself and that he transcends them by his freedom." He continues that "this does not really do justice to the transcendence and otherness of God, since it views God as the Ground rather than the Creator of the world who is distinct from his creatures". [ibid.] Clearly Thomas feels that Tillich has opted for the second definition of "ground" mentioned above.

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<sup>25</sup> Not symbolic. Poetics lacks the precise signification of semiotics. Poetry permits a wider freedom of association. Hence, if philosophy is coupled with poetics, accusations of vagueness are to be expected.

Now we have seen that there is a strong emphasis on transcendence in Tillich's theology, and that his method stresses correlation rather than identity. But, at times, Tillich's assertion of God's transcendence is expressed rather weakly. One passage Thomas may have been thinking of when applying his criticism, is the one in Systematic Theology II where Tillich states that his theology "agrees with the naturalistic view by asserting that God would not be God if he were not the creative ground of everything that has being, that, in fact, he is the infinite and unconditional power of being, or in the most radical abstraction, that he is being-itself. In this respect God is neither alongside things nor even 'above' them; he is nearer to them than they are to themselves. He is their creative ground, here and now, always and everywhere". [Tillich, ST II, p 8, 1957] This explication of the term "ground" leans towards the naturalistic(or pantheistic) view, as Tillich admits, but he then goes on to talk of God "infinitely transcending that of which he is ground" [ibid.] and this transcendence is explained in terms of divine freedom. However, Tillich's explanation of this transcendent freedom is not entirely convincing. He writes:

The divine transcendence is identical with the freedom of the created to turn away from the essential unity with the creative ground of its being. Such freedom presupposes two qualities of the created: first, that it is substantially independent of the divine ground; second, that it remains in substantial unity with it. Without the latter unity, the creature would be without the power of being. It is the quality of finite freedom within the created which makes pantheism impossible and not the notion of a highest being alongside the world, whether his relation to the world is described in deistic or theistic terms.  
[Tillich, ST II, p 9, 1957]

In this passage immanence receives a far greater emphasis than transcendence. In fact, idealism is strongly suggested in the term

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"essential unity" and "naturalistic" pantheism is suggested in the term "substantial unity". It is difficult to see how Tillich, once he has spoken of a substantial unity between God and man, can go on to talk of the two as being "substantially independent". It becomes clear that the term "substantial" is not being used in a precise sense here, for God's independence is then described in terms of a cognitive freedom from man, not in terms of a separation of "substance".

This is a weak expression of God's transcendence. It depends on God's "turning away" from his union with mankind. What exactly does this act of freedom constitute? Tillich seems to imply that it is an act of consciousness or cognitive assertion. Through self-reflective awareness, God is conscious of his superior or transcendent nature and thus is free to think his own thoughts, that is, engage in an infinitely masterful mode of contemplation.

This writer regards this passage as something of a lapse in Tillich's system. In Systematic Theology I, Tillich seemed happier when basing his doctrine of correlation on a shared cognitive process. Here the emphasis changes to an implied unity of essence, with cognition being the area of transcendence. The former emphasis is preferable if Tillich's system is to be seen as one based on correlation rather than identity. A sharing of divine thoughts is a safer base to work from, for it still allows for an infinitely large area of non-correlative thought; a sharing of divine essence implies idealism.

Tillich's normal position on divine transcendence is the one given expression to in his reply to McLean's criticism of pantheism. It



is a position which stresses a qualitative difference between God and man (see page 42). The above passage, though, shows that Tillich enjoys capitalising on the ambiguity of the word "ground". He knows that the Judeo-Christian tradition demands a separation of creator and creation, but it suits his existential theology to blur the distinction at times. Possibly the most trenchant comment one can make about Tillich's system is that it seeks to appropriate the best insights of two mutually exclusive traditions, without fully adopting either. The result is a theology which contains a number of important corrective emphases, but which lacks clarity because of a certain amount of equivocation. The equivocal nature of the term "being-itself" can be appreciated when one examines critical reaction to the term. Thomas is sure that it implies pantheism [Thomas, p 418, 1965]; Novak is equally convinced that it is another term for "Creator", but one which stresses God's closeness with that which he has made:

The word "being-itself" does not refer to a power that is discovered by its interventions within the universe known to science or within the universe known to ordinary experience. It refers, rather, to a power that has determined that the universes of science and ordinary experience, whatever their successive states of affairs, should be rather than not be... If God is conceived as present in all things, not by giving them their character and motions, but by making them to be, his transcendence is preserved.  
[Novak, p 56, 1967]

This latter interpretation would be more acceptable from the viewpoint of traditional theology. If Novak is correct, then Tillich has, by his doctrine of God as being-itself, simply found another way of saying that God has created everything, and cares for this creation dearly. But this explication places Tillich too close to the traditional, cosmological position. Novak does not quite express what Tillich wishes to say. And Thomas's view imputes Tillich

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with an inherent idealism which Tillich would not accept. Both commentators have sought to resolve the ambiguity in Tillich's system by venturing to say which side Tillich is really on. But neither Novak nor Thomas seem to capture what Tillich is saying. This is because, as with the term "ground", "being-itself" conveys a sense of ambiguity. It may, in fact, cautiously be admitted that the appeal of the term lies largely in its indefiniteness. The term does carry a poetical force; it suggests the deepest kind of union and intimacy between God and creation. But just as we begin to respond to it in that sense, we are reminded that, in essence, creator and creature are separate. The poetic aspect of the term works towards idealism; Christian theology rescues the term from such an interpretation. The result (somewhat appositely, with respect to Tillichian theology) is a polar tension between two mutually exclusive doctrines. This situation is an uncomfortable one, for one senses that Tillich wants to appropriate both classical theology and idealism. In colloquial parlance, "he wants it both ways". Philosophically, this cannot be allowed.

However, Tillich's contribution is most significant. Even if the term "being-itself" cannot be accepted as a clear translation of the term "God", Tillich's emphases point to a theological position which is other than the traditional one. There are certain advantages in following the ontological rather than the cosmological approach when debating the existence and nature of God. At the very least, God is no longer seen as an object, but as something more all-pervading. This writer feels that the term "absolute Spirit" might be a useful term of definition for God as long as it is not understood in an idealistic sense, that is, it must be made clear that God is separate from the created reality. The term "Spirit"

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dovetails with traditional theistic assertions that God is indivisible and incorporeal. It also helps to give greater force to the idea of God's omnipresence, since "Spirit" is a term which implies unrestrictedness. Of course, though, idealism gives an even greater application to the idea of omnipresence, since God is the power implicit within organic and material substance in the idealist conception. If one follows the doctrine that God is Spirit, but not universal essence, one brings God close to the world in the sense that he may be said to surround us, but not inhabit us except in the pneumatological sense. This is as far as a philosophy of correlation can go; it may establish God as the "Great Surround", that which brought living beings into being and which now is all around it, brooding over the lives of separate beings and directing the material world towards its final eschatological epiphany. Such a doctrine does not restrict God with respect to space, and does not permit an anthropomorphic conception of him. Further, it attempts to bring God as close to his creation as possible without allowing him to be identified with it.

How is the correlation between God and man effected? Through a sense of communion, which can be described in various ways. Such a communion certainly has a cognitive component; man responds to the Logos structure of the universe. It may be said to have a "spiritual" component; the surrounding presence of the "power of being" communicates something to the sentient part of man, which responds to its own creative source. The above two examples, though, can be subsumed within the idea of a communication between persons. As we have seen, Tillich recognises that the divine-human encounter has to be seen as involving a relationship of personalities if it is to be meaningful. [ST I, p 247, 1955] It is time

to consider whether Tillich successfully accommodates the divine personal category within his theological system.

2.11. An evaluation of Tillich's concept of divine personality

The interplay between divine immanence and divine transcendence is of great importance in Tillich's views on God's personhood. One reason why Tillich will not allow us to say that God is a person is that he feels that equal stress must be placed on God's individualisation and participation. But, as we have seen, God is neither an individual (in the sense of a separate being or entity) nor a participant (in the full sense that idealism would permit) because of the coincidence in God of essence and existence. If anything, the method of correlation should tip the balance slightly towards the pole of individualisation, since the distinction between creator and creature is stressed in this approach. Even if God is not a finite being but absolute Spirit, he is still "the other" in the sense that there is no point of essential unity between himself and man. Communion takes place at the level of correlation, not identity; the correlation may be powerful, but the experience is more like a meeting of persons than a feeling of oneness with universal essence. The difference between Western and Eastern mysticism is this: Western mysticism implies a meeting in which an element of awe and apprehension is still present [see Otto's The Idea of the Holy] while Eastern mysticism involves an experience of integration with the universal soul, and bliss is the essential by-product. It is the same with philosophies of correlation and identity: the former preserves individualisation, while the latter stresses the loss of the individual soul in the divine soul.

Tillich, of course, wants to lay equal stress on individualisation and participation with respect to man and God. Certainly Tillich is prepared to grant man his ontological autonomy [ST I, p 201f, 1955]. Man has freedom of thought and action. So on what basis can man's participation be expressed? Tillich has this to say:

When individualisation reaches the perfect form which we call a "person", participation reaches the perfect form which we call "communion". Man participates in all levels of life, but he participates fully only in that level of life which he is himself - he has communion only with persons. Communion is participation in another completely centred and completely individual self.  
[Tillich, ST I, p 195, 1955]

Now in this passage Tillich's emphasis is Western and traditional. Of course, there is the vagueness of the terms "participation in" in the final sentence, which allows some ambiguity to exist, i.e. some kind of idealistic unity could be read into the text. But the emphasis is more on encounter than integration; persons meet and interact closely. And yet, even if correlation is implied here, the idea of identity is not absent because of the looseness of the term "communion", which means "sharing". It expresses more than the idea of correlation which means "bringing into a mutual relation". So even if Tillich implies that participation involves a close relationship between individuals, his terminology still allows a blurring of the distinctions between the participants. Tillich cannot allow himself to be an idealist, but his terminology is sometimes loose enough to imply idealist notions.

The emphasis of the correlative approach then, should be on separation slightly more than it should be on participation. God, even

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if not a localised being, is still "other" than man. But even if one has reservations about Tillich's assertion that God is equal parts individual and participator [ST I, p 271, 1955], one need not gainsay Tillich's assertion that God is not a person. His doctrine of God has led us to a realisation that God is not a localised finite object, and it can go further to show that God can escape the category of personhood because of the union of existence and essence within God.

This requires careful argument, however. For once again we must take issue with the troublesome word "ground". Part of the immanentist approach lies in asserting that God is not a person because, as participant, he is the "ground" of all personality. [ST I, p 271, 1955] Apart from the fact that the issue of ambiguity again arises, it somehow seems worse to say that God is the "ground of personality" than to say that he is the "ground of all being". "Being can be translated as "existence", and even in an idealist sense, this could just mean that God is the "spark of life" in all creatures. However, with regard to personhood, the ambiguity of "ground" could result in a type of idealism which would make nonsense of the ideas of autonomy and moral responsibility. The most one could say that "ground of personality" means is "creative source of personal consciousness". There can be no fusion of divine and human personality.

Yet Tillich may still be correct to deny the label "person" to God. Leaving the trinitarian aspect of the term aside for the moment, we should examine what the term conventionally means. Usually, a person is identified either in terms of bodily appearance or disposition of character. [Hick, PR, p 100, 1973] With respect to

God, Tillich's concept "being-itself" leads us away from the idea that God has a physical location or appearance. With respect to God's nature Tillich does not deny that meaningful statements can be made, but the way in which such terms are applied is other than the way terms would normally be applied to persons. It will be remembered that the only non-symbolic statement that can be made about God is that he is being-itself. [ST I, p 265, 1955] Ac-

ding to Tillich, all other statements must be made symbolically. [ibid.] This unusual kind of predicative application points to the fact that, when dealing with God, we are dealing with a mode of reality for which special rules appertain. Personhood is a familiar category of reality; here we are dealing with something that goes beyond it. This, at any rate, is Tillich's view.

Very briefly, Tillich's view of applying predicates to God differs from that of Aquinas, who uses a doctrine of analogy. Tillich prefers to ascribe predicates to God symbolically. The difference between their approaches is a result of their different theological methods. Aquinas's cosmological approach to theology claims to establish the existence of God, and once that existence has been established, certain predicates must necessarily be ascribed to God, if the term "God" is correctly understood. It is Thomist doctrine that unaided reason can tell us certain things about God.<sup>26</sup> Tillich's theology is existential and so Tillich denies that symbols of God should arise from logical deduction, but should ex-

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<sup>26</sup> In Aquinas's Summa Theologica an attempt is made to provide rational arguments in support of the truth of Christian doctrine.



press man's existential experience of God.<sup>27</sup> [O'Meara, p 305, 1964] The Catholic view is that we have objective information about God, whereas Tillich eschews such a notion, holding that our knowledge of God is subjective, being based on experience.

Although both Tillich and Aquinas display a reticence when it comes to ascribing predicates to God, Aquinas is more confident of what he can accomplish. For when Aquinas says, for example, that God is "good", he claims to be making a literal statement, albeit one based on analogy. Explaining the Thomist position Hick says: "When we say that God is good, we are saying that there is a quality of the infinitely perfect Being that corresponds to what at our human level we call goodness." [Hick, PR, p 70, 1973] Of course, proper "goodness" belongs only to God; the "goodness" of man mirrors it, at most, imperfectly.

It must be pointed out that an analogy both affirms and denies something, [Weigel in O'Meara, p 10, 1964] and that Aquinas's theology takes cognizance of the ineffective side of analogy insofar as Aquinas speaks of "equivocity", the principle that symbols are ambiguous. [McLean in O'Meara, pp 154-155] Tillich is close to Aquinas here. However, Tillich stresses God's infinite transcendence of finite categories, whereas Aquinas prefers to talk of analogy in terms of "proportional" differences between God and man with respect to certain qualities. [McLean in O'Meara, p 158]

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<sup>27</sup> And, of course, as such experience changes, certain symbols lose their effectiveness e.g. the symbol of the "Blessed Virgin" in Protestantism. [O'Meara, p 306, 1964]

On the basis of proportionality, analogy can be effective in the Thomist view.

Tillich, however, lest God be seen as the perfect person as opposed to man as limited person, seeks to deny the effectiveness of analogy by proportion. Proportional comparisons cannot be made if the realm of the divine infinitely transcends the finite realm:

That which is the true ultimate transcends the realm of finite reality infinitely. Therefore, no finite reality can express it directly and properly... Whatever we say about that which concerns us ultimately, whether or not we call it God, has a symbolic meaning... The language of faith is the language of symbols.

[Tillich, DF, pp 44-45, 1957]

This is a very powerful statement in support of the idea of the transcendence of God. For if God transcends the finite world infinitely, a question mark must be placed against the efficacy of analogy, since the "goodness" of man cannot really express the "goodness" of God at all. Here the meaning of correlation is to be understood with respect to the concepts of grace and revelation. Because Tillich is an existential theologian, he maintains that God is somehow discernable. However, if God "infinitely transcends finite reality", this discernability is on the basis of God revealing himself to man rather than on the basis of an intrinsic relatedness of essence. Revelation is "the manifestation of something within the context of ordinary experience but it transcends the ordinary context of experience". [Tillich, ST I, p 121, 1955] Revelation, then, is a special dispensation. Therefore, we see that correlation is the product of divine initiative.

Now, with regard to all this, Tillich shows that he is not an idealist but is one who respects the traditional theistic doctrine that a distinction between creator and created must be maintained. Indeed, he presses the point. His doctrine of symbols asserts that symbols applied to God must be both affirmed and denied. [Tillich, ST II, p 10, 1957] They must be affirmed because, following from the nature of the divine-human encounter, it is more accurate to say that God is "good" rather than that he is not; they must be denied because symbols cannot essentially capture the nature of God's goodness.<sup>28</sup>

So then, by virtue of the fact that God is incorporeal and lacks characteristics which may be literally described, it can be argued that he is not a person. Tillich's doctrine of God as personal, then, stands or falls by the cogency of the idea that God is "not less than personal" [ST I, p 271, 1955]. Owen is quite sure that it is unacceptable to talk of a God who is both personal and supra-personal. [Owen, p 129, 1971] He goes on to compare Tillich's doctrine of God's personality with that of Radhakrishnan, who claims that it is necessary to apply personal terms to God because the personal category is the highest category of which we know in this finite existence. [Owen, p 117, 1971] This, it seems, is what Tillich also wants to say. For man to be ultimately concerned, he must feel that he is involved in a personal encounter. But God does not have to be a person for such an encounter to take place. All that is required is the experience from man's side that he is always

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<sup>28</sup> Catholics too, of course, are reluctant to assert that we have "any clear intuition of God's essence". [Copleston, in Russell, p 137, 1967] Yet the doctrine of analogy comes very close to saying at least that much.

being "held and comprehended by something that is greater than he is, that has a claim upon him, and that demands response from him". [Tillich, SF, p 46, 1948] It is important that man should be able to enter the religious encounter at his ultimate level of comprehension; it is also essential that he feels comprehended. So a sense of God must be experienced in which loving consciousness is involved. But it can scarcely be denied that impenetrable mysteries lie beyond such a loving consciousness.

Such a view, then, asserts that God meets man at the levels of consciousness and concern. But what of the element of "strangeness", of "otherness" implied in such a conception? Does this element not provide us with a problem concerning God's being knowable and understandable? Is the God who can be met but not essentially comprehended, one about whom one can feel confident? The man who hears that God transcends personhood may feel apprehensive about dealing with such a God. The transcendent aspect may disturb him for he may think in terms of personality being a kind of "mask" of the transpersonal. He will seek some sort of reassurance about what lies behind the mask.

But at his disposal is the gift of speculation, and this gift may well lead him to a point of comprehension based on his grasp of the contents of historical revelation. And, on top of this, the speculator may receive the even greater gift of communion with the divine. The theology of experience provides a context for faith: "The ultimate concern is concern about what is experienced as ultimate." [Tillich, DF, p 9, 1957] At the level of personal cognition at which the encounter takes place, man glimpses infinity. Trust in the transpersonal aspect of God is based on the experience

of communion with the divine that takes place at the finite level. Man cannot comprehend the nature of infinity (for analogies fail) but he knows that he can enter into communion with the infinite (a communion he can only describe in symbolic terms). He has faith in the transpersonal because he experiences a comprehending love at the finite level at which he operates.

Christianity can go even further. To be sure, divine transcendence has an element of incomprehensibility (quite unavoidable when one is looking at the infinite from a finite viewpoint). This is precisely the reason why a divine incarnation was necessary. Thus Tillich asserts that Jesus is the final revelation of God.

[Tillich, ST I, p 148, 1955] Leaving aside the complex problems of trinitarian formulation, it can be argued that in Christ we have a living example of the divine nature under the conditions of existence. [Tillich, ST II, p 136, 1957] Jesus claims that "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father". (John 14:9; NEB) This statement does not have to be interpreted literally for it to be effective. Thus Robinson writes: "Jesus never claims to be God, personally; yet he always claims to bring God, completely." [Robinson, p 73, 1963] Robinson's statement is in line with Tillich's thinking.<sup>29</sup>

It can be argued that Tillich's strong emphasis on God's transcendence with respect to the issue of divine personality can be offset by the doctrine that Christ is the New Being - he conveys

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<sup>29</sup> Tillich has been described as an "adoptionist theologian" [e.g. O'Meara, p 295, 1964] because of his reluctance to equate, fully, the terms "God" and "Christ". He admits that the description might be applicable to him. [In O'Meara, 309] God cannot cease to be God, and become man. [ST II, p 109] However, adoptionism holds that Christ was imbued with the full power of God (either from birth or when older) and so, through observing Christ, we can be sure of God's benevolence.

the nature of God while cementing a new understanding between God and man.

Tillich's doctrine of God's personality, then, can be upheld. It does, though, stand at the transcendent pole of his thought. For, if God is not a person, his "otherness" is given strong emphasis. However, he does meet man at the levels of comprehension and concern. What ultimately has to be argued though (and all theologians must address this problem) is that consciousness and concern can be predicated of that which is incorporeal and invisible.

Christianity must uphold the idea that the invisible God is conscious. Can it do so in a way that is coherent? And can it do so in a way that appeals to the popular imagination? The former question inquires about philosophical cogency; the latter is interested in a man's worshipping response. Both questions must be addressed to determine exactly how we are to imagine the God of theism. We must also decide if Tillich's theology makes it easier for man to grasp the idea of God.

#### 2.12. Is Tillich's God an imaginable God?

Both the religious philosopher and the ordinary worshipper need a God they can imagine. The religious man may well appreciate that finite creatures cannot conceive of the infinite, yet he knows that man needs a way of thinking about that which he worships. To be sure, the believer can claim to apprehend God at work in the world, but he still needs to think of God qua other-worldly being. And the natural way to go about this is by way of anthropomorphic thinking. "Understanding the world for a man is reducing it to the

human, stamping it with his seal", writes Camus. Certainly it is true that man has a propensity to translate all aspects of reality into human terms. [Camus, p 23, 1975] This applies as much to man's thought of heaven as to his thoughts about earthly things. Freud, too, has affirmed man's dependence on anthropomorphic thought. [Freud, FI pp 38-39, 1949] This is particularly obvious when one considers the kinds of anthropomorphism that still exist today in the popular consciousness with respect to religious thought.<sup>30</sup>

However, we must not be overly condemnatory, scorning those who can only conceive of the divine in patently inadequate terms. Really, being finite, what else can we do but use finite categories to describe God? Of course we have to, but Tillich is correct in pointing out that we have to use finite descriptions with due appreciation of their inadequacy. Anything in reality may be used as a symbol to express something of the divine nature (and Tillich stresses the potency of symbols as much as he warns of their limitedness) but finite descriptions will always fall short.

There has to be some way, though, of talking of the infinite, of God, without resorting to symbols or anthropomorphisms. Tillich has advanced "God is being-itself" as the statement which is the least conditioned by finite categories. Is it possible to imagine being-itself? Since the term has a certain ambiguity about it, it obviously does not lend itself to pictorial description. If we

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<sup>30</sup> Novak quotes the example of a Russian cosmonaut who, after returning to earth, said that he hadn't seen God. [Novak, p 63, 1967] The cosmonaut had, presumably, expected to see a somewhat large and grandiose human being.



decide to suppress the transcendent aspect of Tillich's thought and concentrate on terms like "ground" and "depth", does an imaginable picture then emerge? The most natural idea to spring to mind is the one that seeks to equate divinity with substance, even material substance. When looking for God, in the most primitive sense, one wants, literally, to see something there. Like the cosmonaut searching the cosmic horizons, one wants to rest one's eyes on something solid and tangible. If God is not a person out in space, perhaps he can then be the totality of all material existence. But not even the pantheists believe that, as we have seen (see p. 45).

So we need a more sophisticated way of translating Tillich's "ground" and "depth". We eventually have to arrive at the term "Spirit". Is "Spirit" imaginable, either in the idealist sense of being the power and energy implicit within objects, or in the sense of a reality which surrounds material objects?<sup>31</sup> Well, Christian dogma insists that God qua Spirit is incorporeal, hence invisible. Therefore the concept of Spirit does not render a pictorial representation of itself. It is clear that the term "Spirit" must be understood in such a way that it expresses infinity; but finite minds cannot grasp infinity. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the concept "Spirit" cannot be imagined; it means that it cannot be imagined in terms of pictorial detail. To the extent that man

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<sup>31</sup> This writer feels that this latter conception best captures what Tillich is seeking to express.

needs pictorial detail,<sup>32</sup> the concept "Spirit" is lacking in attractiveness.

The idealist's attempted solution to this problem is perhaps more satisfying than the theist's. The kind of divine implicitness within nature that idealism stresses allows the idea that, in an indirect way, God can be seen in nature. Such an idea was given expression to by the poet, Hopkins, when he wrote, "There lives the dearest freshness deep down things". [From God's Grandeur] Through his concept of "inscape", Hopkins drew attention to what could be described as the power of being implicit within natural objects. In the same poem he says: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God", implying the inherent working of divine energy within natural objects. This apprehension of divinity within nature was not foreign to Tillich: "He loved to walk - to walk and to talk - and the sight of sunlight making spring leaves translucent would make him halt, breathless, at their beauty." [Novak, p 53, 1967] Somehow or other, Tillich intuited, God must be present within the beauty of nature. He could so easily have expressed the idea of depth in the way Hopkins did, so as to signify the presence of universal essence within nature. One senses that Tillich wanted to on occasions. Clearly, he was aware of the advantage of presenting nature as the "face of God". Because being-itself is an ambiguous term, there is a suggestion of naturalism in Tillich's system. And this writer is convinced that Tillich somehow wanted to retain that element. But idealism never received unequivocal support from Paul Tillich.

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<sup>32</sup> Houston Smith argues that most men desire some kind of graphic representation of God. [Smith, pp 72-73, 1965]

Theism lauds and admires creation, and for the believer nature is patently the work of a mighty God. But God, as Spirit, is not seen as indwelling matter in the idealist sense, so creation cannot be the "face of God" in the theistic view. How does theism, then, want us to imagine God? Are we to persist with anthropomorphic images, all the while telling ourselves: "Of course God has no physical appearance at all"? Is it not better to stop trying to identify God? Were the Hebrews not forbidden to make any pictorial representation of God (Exodus 20:4) and dissuaded even from naming him? (Gen 32:29) Yet, is it not natural for man to desire a picture, an image, a representation of that which he worships?

Such a desire does seem natural enough but, if theism is correct, this desire cannot be met on a literal level. What we are left to believe, then, is that God is incorporeal, yet possesses a disembodied intelligence. Within our experience, intelligence is a function of the brain, which itself is part of a material body. Can physics help us to construct a model of something which is all-embracing and invisible, but which has a mind of sorts and, presumably, feelings of a kind? The answer, at present, is no. But then religion is a subject for metaphysicians, not physicists. Believers must quite openly proclaim that there can be no physical or pictorial model for God from within the finite world. Theists, conscious of the primitiveness of anthropomorphic thought, must persist with the category of Spirit. This category must receive increasing attention and explication, so that man becomes more informed about that which he believes to be ultimate.

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Tillich's term "being-itself" has little visual power. Traditional theism at least conveys a picture of God, albeit the anthropomorphic one of an enthroned, majestic king. Idealism, in an indirect way, presents nature as the visual expression of God, and thus has some illustrative appeal. Being-itself, if it is to mean anything at all, is the omnipresent spirit of the universe. It has no appearance. It is apprehended through its effects (in nature and in man) and, non-pictorially, through the imagination.

The man who fully grasps all this, and still worships, is one who has rejected the prevailing nominalism of his own time. As we have seen, nominalism believes in entities and not universals. Flew, for example, argues that for God to be identifiable (at least in theory), he would have to be an individual entity. [Flew, pp 34; 36, 1966] It seems as though nominalism holds that, for something to be, it must have material form. Nominalism, however, would be amenable to suggestions that there may be other forms of existence outside of matter as we know it. A nominalist could, theoretically, admit the possibility of what could be called "spiritual substance"; however, this nominalist would only accept such a possibility if this "spiritual substance" was thought of as having a shape of some kind. The nominalist can understand the idea that God has some kind of shimmering celestial bodily form.<sup>33</sup> God would, then, still be a thing - a perceivable object which could be given a name because it has an instance in reality.

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<sup>33</sup> It may well be that this is the picture of God most worshippers carry with them. One could describe it as sophisticated anthropomorphism. The picture retains the human image of God, but it denies that God has a material substance; rather, his is a more refined "substance".

Tillich abjures nominalism. In doing so, he proposes to teach the western world another way of looking at reality. He certainly has rendered theism a favour in this regard, reminding believers that the Christian God is held to be "without body, parts, or passions". But Tillich's God is not accessible to the popular imagination precisely because Tillich attempts to present a more sophisticated concept of God. It would be fair to say that his theological system is too complex and "technical" for the ordinary believer to grasp.

But Tillich does not wish to be abstruse and recondite. His writings, lectures and sermons differ in the separate demands they make on their readers/listeners. Tillich would agree with Miller when he says, "Certainly we would be left cold if Billy Graham were to conclude one of his evangelistic broadcasts with the benediction, 'And may the Ground of Being bless you real good!'" [Miller, p 201, 1972] Such a pronouncement from the pulpit would be patently absurd. Tillich does use his particular brand of philosophical language from the pulpit, but he goes out of his way to try to translate such terminology into accessible concepts for his congregation.<sup>34</sup> He does, too, retain much that is traditional and familiar. He would not have thought of using the term "Ground of Being" in a benediction. That he believed in the traditional devotional symbols can be clearly seen in his protracted discussion on symbolic theology in Systematic Theology I; there he affirms all the traditional Christian imagery, insofar as it can be af-

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<sup>34</sup> For example, in The Shaking of the Foundations, p 57, Tillich painstakingly explains what he means by "the infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being".

firmed. Of course, Tillich denies the adequacy of the symbols, but makes it clear that they have value. [Tillich, ST I, pp 265ff]

And yet, within the contexts of familiar biblical passages, Tillich does attempt to wean his congregation away from the standard and prescribed pattern of nominalist thought with which they grew up. He believes his listeners will understand. He believes that his concept of God as being-itself is translatable. Yet those who break new ground, especially those who try to lead men to fine deeply entrenched conceptions (or misconceptions), run the risk of being misunderstood. Philosophers have found Tillich difficult; how much more, then, the general public? To be sure, Tillich's congregations were largely composed of academics and people associated with the world of learning. Yet even scholars could find him bemusing:

An eminent American philosopher - "the high priest of positivism" he was called by the relator of this anecdote - was once obliged to hear Tillich preach at the funeral of an academic colleague. Tillich did not speak of hell or heaven, nor of the God of mercy and judgement; he spoke of anxiety, courage, ultimate concern, and being-itself. Descending the steps of the chapel, the philosopher grumped angrily: "Why, the man is not a Christian at all!" [Novak, p 62, 1967]

The philosopher was, presumably, puzzled at the way Tillich used modern-day terminology to translate Biblical concepts. Being a logical positivist (and hence a nominalist), he would also have found the concept of being-itself confusing. One cannot help feeling that many people have found Tillich difficult, for similar reasons. The modern terminology, though, one could learn to assimilate; the trans-nominalism of Tillich's thought, however, presents difficulties.

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